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# **FROM SINAI TO JERUSALEM**

**A Study of the Hebrew Text of Psalm 68**

**Dissertation Submitted to the Theology Department,**

**University of Durham**

**for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by Mark Anthony Vincent**

**July 2001**

**(Supervisor: Dr C.T.R. Hayward)**

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation presents a study of one of the most difficult texts in the Psalter, Psalm 68. After an introduction setting out the distinctive features of my treatment and arguing for the need for a painstaking literary study, I divide my work into three sections. The first of these presents a translation with detailed notes on the text. The second explores this world of the text in more detail by examining the vocabulary of the Psalm (characterisation, semantic domains including geographical terms), its structural makeup (building from the smallest units to the largest), the central use and importance of intertextual connections, and the presence of ambiguity and ‘underdeterminacy’. I examine each of these as being of interest in their own right, but the ultimate purpose is to use them to deduce what a good reading of the Psalm might be and to cast light on its meaning(s) both to an original audience and to subsequent readers. By the end of this section I will have argued for an ‘original’ setting in the reigns of David or Solomon, one which is closely linked to the bringing of the ark to Zion and the building of the temple. My third section tackles the matter of writers and readers more explicitly. Although I shall have studied the text as one hitherto (since this is the only form in which we possess it), I now examine whether the Psalm ‘should’ be seen as essentially a unity, and ask what can be known about its compositional history. I then turn to the question of dating, followed by a more explicit consideration of the implied audience of the text. Much work has been done on the possible cultic use of Psalm 68; I review this as part of my work on audience, before turning to the question of other readers in a final chapter. Although I shall have been primarily concerned with the initial meaning of Psalm 68 in the dissertation (for reasons of space), that chapter presents concluding reflections on the way in which the Psalm has been used subsequently and may still be used; I reflect on the continued power of the Psalm to speak through the centuries. Psalm 68 is indeed a complex text, but one which abundantly repays close reading and study, and one which is still fascinating, vivid, and arresting in the modern world.

# **FROM SINAI TO JERUSALEM**

## **A Study of the Hebrew Text of Psalm 68**

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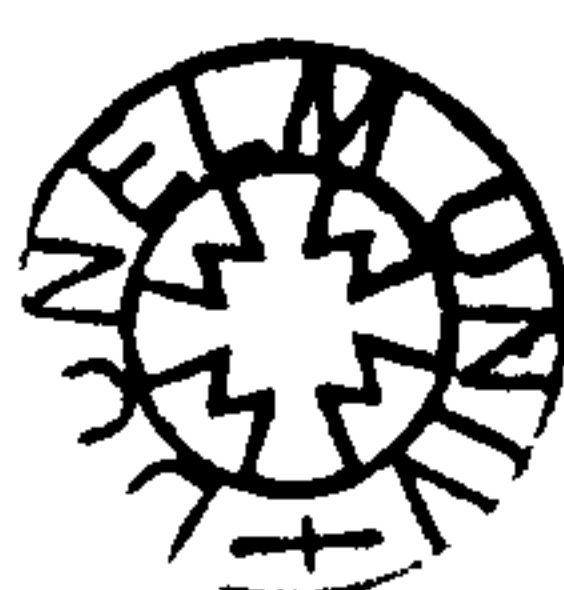
**University of Durham**

**for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by Mark Anthony Vincent**

**July 2001**

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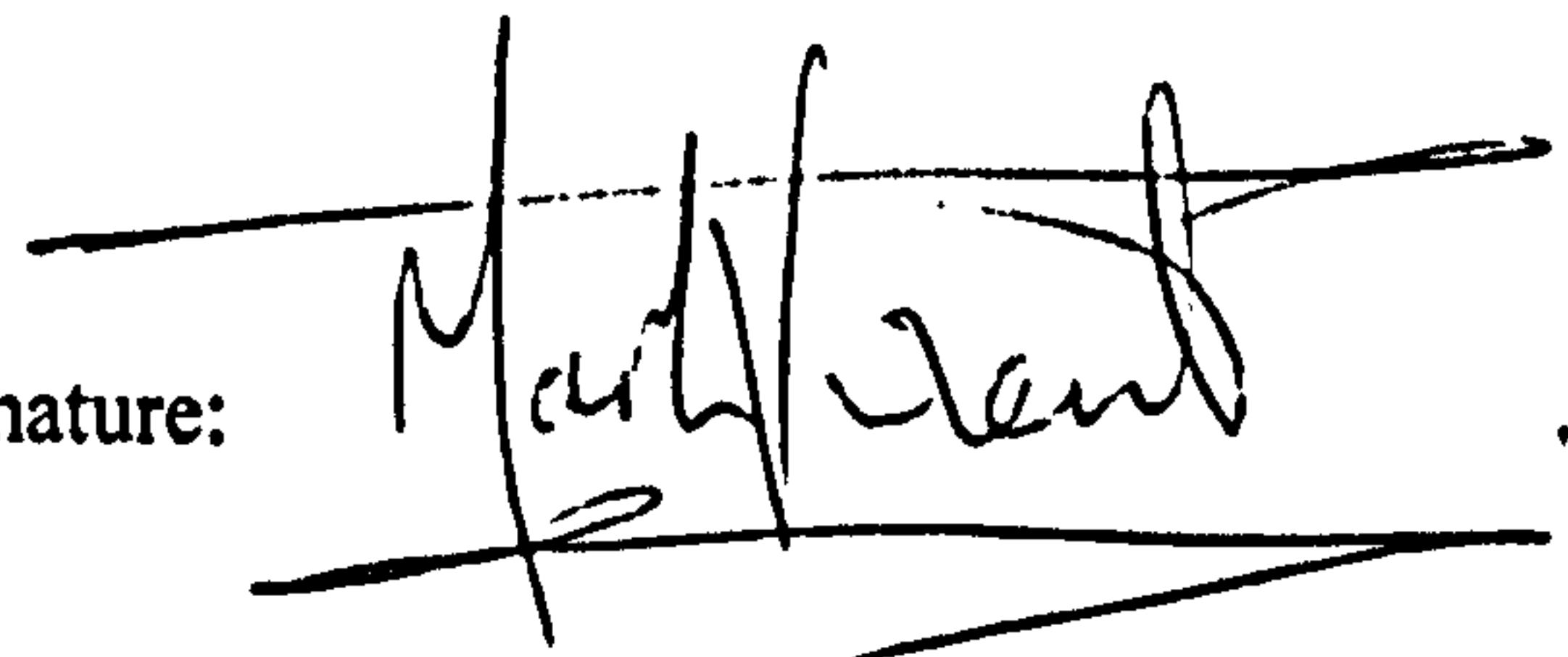
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I confirm that the thesis conforms with the prescribed word length for the degree for which I am submitting it for examination.

I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other university. If material has been generated through joint work, my independent contribution has been clearly indicated. In all other cases material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark Kent', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large 'M' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Date:

23 July 2001

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Throughout my work on this project (not to mention my preceding MA year) I have been grateful for Robert Hayward's friendly and enthusiastic supervision. He had faith in my ability to make a swift move from the world of Korean and Chinese to PhD level Biblical Studies, and his encouragement and support when I wanted to write on other texts 'just for fun' was warmly appreciated.

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Finally, thanks are due to my family, in particular my wife Anita and to my mother Janet for helping in many ways.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AB	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
AV	<i>Authorised (King James) Version of 1611 (also referred to as KJV)</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	<i>Brown, Driver and Briggs' Hebrew Lexicon</i>
BHK	<i>Biblia Hebraica Kittel</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BZAW	<i>Bulletin der Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CUP	Cambridge University Press
FS	Festschrift
Ges	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTS	<i>JSOT Supplements Series</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
LXX	Septuagint
K-B3	<i>Kohler-Baumgartner's Hebrew Lexicon, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition</i>
KJV	<i>King James (Authorised) Version of 1611 (also referred to as AV)</i>
Mss	Manuscripts
MT	Massoretic Text (usually as given by BHS)
NEB	<i>New English Bible</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version (= Revised Authorised)</i>
OTL	<i>Old Testament Library</i>
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
SBLDS	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
Tg	Targum
UF	<i>Ugaritische Forschung</i>
UP	University Press
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTs	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Abbreviations for biblical books follow standard conventions and should be easily identifiable.

# INTRODUCTION

## ***Why Psalm 68?***

Why a dissertation on Psalm 68, and, given that one has been written, why should anyone want to read it? Can one Psalm of 220 or so words justify a treatment of 100 000? These are important matters with which to begin.

First of all, Psalm 68 is widely regarded to be the most difficult Psalm in the Psalter; that statement of itself is sufficient to answer the questions above. There are few aspects to its study which can be said to command a scholarly consensus, but on the matter of its supreme complexity there is little doubt.<sup>1</sup>

The complexity exists at two levels. First, what does the Psalm *say*? From a textual and philological point of view the text has more than its fair share of problems, and even when some of these have been resolved one is left with an even harder task: working out how the disparate parts of the Psalm relate to each other. Second, what does the Psalm *mean*, what is it *about*? As the literature on the Psalm soon reveals, a bewildering array of interpretations has been offered. There is a timely need to think through the available options and at least narrow down the possibilities.

In addition to the intrinsic fascination of Psalm 68, it is a text which raises many issues of wider interest to study of the Psalms and the Hebrew Bible. The nature of the cult and the extent to which it can be reconstructed from the Psalms is one such issue. Another is the relationship between the Psalms and other Ancient Near East (ANE) texts. What is to be made of the Canaanite parallels that can be found, for example? Are they simply borrowings, or are they polemic *against* Canaanite belief and practice — and how would one know the difference? The theological dimension of violence in religious texts and its role in Israelite religion (as well as in Judaism and Christianity) is another matter which holds interest. And what happens when a text like this is read eschatologically? Then there is the juxtaposition of Sinai and Jerusalem, unique within the Hebrew Bible, and the important linking of these traditions through God's theophanic march. Each one of these issues is deeply interesting, and arises naturally from a consideration of Psalm 68. It is a Psalm with important implications for a broad spectrum of concerns within the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> Virtually all commentators begin with a statement to this effect, for example J.P. Le Peau, *Psalm 68: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (unpublished PhD; University of Iowa, 1981).



## Previous Treatments

In addition to the many thorough treatments in the commentaries, a number of special studies of Psalm 68 have been published in journals and monographs. Albright's study in *HUCA* was a classic and has been referred to in virtually every study since; the literary approaches of Auffret and Fokkelman are also noteworthy in quite a different way.<sup>2</sup> Turning to monographs, the fact that a scholar of the stature of Mowinckel devoted a 100-page book to Psalm 68 stands as a further indication of its significance.<sup>3</sup> Since Mowinckel there have been four monograph-length treatments of the Psalm, although only two of these have been published, neither of them in English.<sup>4</sup>

There are two characteristic features of these treatments which I believe make this dissertation all the more timely. First, many of the significant discussions are now quite old; study of the Hebrew Bible has moved on, and a text as complex as this requires all the new insights and knowledge that can be brought to bear upon it. The second is that many treatments either approach the Psalm with a particular agenda for understanding the Psalms (such as a theory of an autumn festival), or else arrive at an understanding of it with insufficient consideration of alternative approaches. Mowinckel, unsurprisingly, falls at the first of these hurdles. LePeau, in his much more recent treatment, rightly employs a literary sensitivity in his attempt to understand the Psalm, but dismisses in far too cursory a fashion more traditional concerns.

## Methodology

It is impossible to approach a text without preconceptions. I had read Psalm 68 many times before I began to study it for a PhD, and even were this not the case, my previous opinions about many things, not just the Psalms, would have interacted with and influenced the study. One's preconceptions naturally incline one to accept certain kinds of interpretations and reject others; they steer one towards the use of certain methodologies and inculcate scepticism towards others. In the terms of intertextuality (and by the very use of the term I shall have already aligned myself) the exegete's life and experience is a text with which the text of Psalm 68 cannot help but dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems—Ps LXVIII" *HUCA* 23.1 (1950), p1-39; P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël c'est lui. Étude structurelle du Psaume 68" in *Merveilles a nos yeux* (BZAW 235; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), p1-30; J.P. Fokkelman, "The Structure of Psalm 68" in A. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past (Oudtestamentische Studien XXVI)*; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p72-83.

<sup>3</sup> S. Mowinckel, *Der Achtundsechzigste Psalm* (Oslo: J Dybwad, 1953).

<sup>4</sup> The published works are J. Vlaaderingerbroek, *Psalm 68* (Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1973); C. Carniti, *Il salmo 68. Studio letterario (Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 68)*; Roma: LAS, 1985). The unpublished dissertations are J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68*, and R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985).

Since the readerly revolution in biblical study it has been increasingly recognised that this is not only inevitable, but also that it is no bad thing. What is important, by contrast, is to be aware of one's proclivities and assumptions, and to make them explicit; this I have endeavoured to do. The many readings of Psalm 68 available in both the scholarly and popular marketplaces have been produced by and large without doing this, and without sufficient recognition of the influence preconceptions have had on their interpretative enterprise.

At every stage therefore I have sought to make overt the methodological assumptions I am making, and to be explicit about the interpretative steps that are being taken. At times this may border on pedantry, but I hope that by the end of the work the approach will have justified itself. It will do so by enabling a much clearer presentation of the interpretative options the Psalm presents, and an analysis of how interpreters can (and even should) decide between them.

A further methodological technique I have adopted is to try to wear different interpretative hats — to ask what the Psalm would look like if one approached it in this or that particular way, or if one had such-and-such a set of preconceptions. This will cast light on the art and practice of commentary and interpretation, and is basic to the task of meta-commentary, or 'commentating on the commentators.'<sup>5</sup> Since the examination of previous studies is a necessary part of dissertation-writing, the task of meta-commentary cannot be escaped.

### ***A 'Literary' Approach***

My basic approach in this dissertation is a literary one, a designation which requires some clarification. As John Barton has pointed out, it is a caricature to set literary approaches in stark opposition to historical-criticism, since much if not most of the work that passes under the latter designation is a *literary* historical criticism.<sup>6</sup> The 'primary source' under investigation is a *text*, and one must necessarily take a literary approach in order to discover the 'realities' behind that text and the origins of it. Historical critical questions remain legitimate questions to ask of a text; they are one avenue which literary criticism can explore. The confusion arises because the designation 'literary approach' is usually used within Biblical Studies to refer to a particular *kind* of literary approach, usually the 'new literary

---

<sup>5</sup> On meta-commentary, compare the essays in D.J.A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTS 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> J. Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," in J. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p9-20.



criticism' (a term coined in the sixties), or perhaps Russian formalism or structuralism, for example.<sup>7</sup> In this work I am concerned with several different types of 'literary approach.'

Although these various kinds of literary criticism have developed in a certain chronological sequence, each successive stage ought not to be thought of as having replaced or even necessarily as having improved on its predecessors. Different kinds of literary criticism do different things with the texts to which they are applied, enabling those texts to be perceived in different ways and a variety of insights to be obtained. Furthermore, some methods work better on certain texts than others; there is a sense in which the method of analysis is selected by the text and what one wishes to do with it. It is a nonsense to think, for instance, that since the so-called 'death of the author'<sup>8</sup> literary critics are no longer concerned with authors. Likewise, a reader-response approach as advocated by Fish and others does not render Russian formalism obsolete, even though it enables one to perceive more clearly that Russian formalism (say) is not sufficient *on its own* to say all that one might want to say about a text. There is no one 'right' literary approach, and being a good critic involves being able to determine which techniques will be most illuminating for a particular text and a particular purpose.<sup>9</sup> One particular avenue of 'modern' literary criticism which is particularly illuminating for Psalm 68 is the study of intertextuality; this is because of the kind of text Psalm 68 happens to be.<sup>10</sup>

It is helpful (and has been common practice) to make a three-way distinction in the methodology of literary criticism. First, there are approaches which locate meaning in the text itself and are concerned with a text *as a text in its own right* ('text-centred' approaches). Second, there are approaches which are more concerned with a text as a historical document, as a window on the world or community which produced it (these approaches locate meaning with the author and focus on the world behind the text). Third, other approaches emphasise the role of the reader of texts (reader-response; ideological criticism); indeed, one can imagine oneself to be various different readers in an attempt to see how the text would sound

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<sup>7</sup> R. Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989; orig. 1985).

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana, 1977; orig. 1968).

<sup>9</sup> The points in this paragraph are well made in J.W. Sider, *Interpreting the Parables – A Hermeneutical Guide to their Meaning* (*Studies in Contemporary Interpretation*; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p14-18.

<sup>10</sup> An intertextual approach is especially appropriate because of the extensive allusions and quotations which Psalm 68 makes to other texts (p138,142). Second, Psalm 68 is deliberately underdetermined (p192); it is a text with gaps and ambiguities, a text which encourages multiple readings; this makes the application of reader-response criticism particularly appropriate since the preconceptions one has as a reader go a long way to filling out those gaps and creating an interpretation.

to such an audience (this, incidentally, is a helpful way to approach the study of the history of interpretation of texts).<sup>11</sup>

Relating this to Biblical Studies, modern study had for a long time focussed almost exclusively on the second of these three avenues; the first was used purely as a route to the second, and the third was only invoked when something arose in the text which caused offence or discomfort to the expositor and which had to be 'explained'. When so-called 'literary approaches' first made their impact within Biblical Studies, it was generally the first, text-centred, kind of approach that was involved. Since then readerly approaches and, subsequently, ideological critique have become more common.

Several decades have passed since the appearance of Alter's seminal *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, and other groundbreaking studies by Sternberg, Bar-Efrat, Damrosch and Polzin.<sup>12</sup> The application of literary techniques has not made nearly the same impact on the study of biblical poetry that it has on narrative, however. Alter's own work *The Art of Biblical Poetry*,<sup>13</sup> for example, is not nearly so illuminating as his earlier work on narrative. It seems to me that the literary study of biblical poetry has lagged behind because it has not usually been done in sufficiently inspiring a way as to affect the kind of revolution to which literary studies of narrative have led (rather than because the techniques are not applicable to poetry). Some effort has been made to apply literary techniques to Psalm 68 before,<sup>14</sup> but much more remains to be done. I have attempted to make a start here.

### ***Plan of the Dissertation***

After presenting a translation of the text with detailed notes in the first section, my dissertation continues in the second section (and at greatest length) with a text-centred approach which works with the final form of the text. I ask questions like: What words and constructions are used and what do they mean? What literary devices and techniques are at

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<sup>11</sup> Compare, for instance, some of the work done on Isaiah, notably K.P. Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God (Literary Currents in Biblical Tradition)*; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). Compare also the approach in J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah* (WBC 24&24a; Waco: Word, 1985, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative – Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature)*; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987; orig. 1985); S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible (JSOTS 70)*; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989; orig. Hebrew 1979, 1984); R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature)*; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993; orig. 1980) and succeeding volumes; D. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant – Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987). A good overview is given in D.M. Gunn and D.N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible (Oxford Bible Series)*; Oxford: OUP, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985)

<sup>14</sup> In particular, J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68*; C. Carniti, *Il salmo 68*; P. Auffret "Le Dieu d'Israël"; J.P. Fokkelman, "Psalm 68"; M. Girard, *Les Psaumes Redécouverts de la Structure au Sens* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1994).

work in their arrangement? What structural and other devices does the text itself contain which help us to interpret it? What other texts, written and otherwise, are woven into the fabric of Psalm 68? At points during this discussion I also ask why these features may have been placed in the text and what they may indicate about those that produced it (the second category, above) — and also what effect they might have (or have had) on readers ancient and modern. But it is not until the final major section of the dissertation that such questions will be faced more squarely.

In that third section I shall be looking at the world of the author and the world of the reader. The first of these involves the traditional concerns of historical criticism, attempting to infer from the Psalm the world which produced it and examining the world it purports to describe. I then turn to the reader, summing up what I think the Psalm may have meant to its original audience and looking briefly at some of the ways it has been read since. All this will be built on the data presented in the text-centred section; by this point the text-as-text will have been studied in sufficient detail as to greatly facilitate the inquiry into the worlds of author and reader.



# PART I

## TEXT, TRANSLATION, AND NOTES

This section provides much of the groundwork and a source of reference for the rest of the study. I begin with a description of the broad principles I have used to determine and translate the text, followed by a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew text without notes or explanations. This is followed by a repeat of the translation, this time accompanied by the consonantal Hebrew with extensive notes. My primary concern throughout the dissertation is with the Hebrew text as presented in MT, but in the notes I make some comments about the Versions and explore possible emendations and alternative meanings / translations of the Hebrew. I discuss problematic aspects of the language of Psalm 68 without any attempt at this stage to integrate the solutions proposed into an overall understanding of the Psalm.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I recognise that it is not possible entirely to disengage one's assessment of a particular crux from one's assessment of the Psalm as a whole. Nor should one want to, since the second can help the first: in a circular fashion one's assessment of each crux feeds into the overall interpretation one is constructing; this in turn influences one's treatment of the crux. What I am referring to here is my mode of *presentation*, however, not the way the conclusions were arrived at.

# OVERVIEW OF PRINCIPLES USED

Textual criticism is not an exact science. Nevertheless, there are certain principles which I have tried to follow in my translation and notes which are best made explicit:

- In translating Psalm 68, I have striven for as literal a rendering as possible, while keeping within the bounds of idiomatic English. I have tried to keep my translation 'open' to different interpretations rather than presenting a 'closed' translation which reflects one particular understanding and excludes others.<sup>16</sup> I am concerned to beg as few questions as possible at this stage.
- My primary interest is the Masoretic Hebrew text.<sup>17</sup> I have almost always followed the consonantal Masoretic text unless it is either incomprehensible or the Ancient Versions suggest a better reading. I have deliberately sought to avoid the conjectural emendation which was customary to a previous generation of scholarship;<sup>18</sup> I have not thought it necessary to comment on every suggestion of emendation I have come across; I have restricted myself to proposals which have held a consensus or are for some other reason of particular interest.
- I have also tried to follow the Masoretic pointing where it seems reasonable to do so, regarding it as a 'first base' from which alternatives can be explored. On a number of occasions repointing is necessary to make sense of the text, but on many cases in which the Versions imply a different pointing, MT pointing represents a reading which is at least as good. In such cases I follow MT.
- In cases when particular lexical items have a meaning in standard biblical Hebrew but *may* have a different meaning (based on evidence from a word in a cognate language such as Ugaritic) I have almost always translated in accordance with standard Hebrew and

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<sup>16</sup> Ambiguity and the possibility for multiple readings of the Psalm is a topic I explore on p192.

<sup>17</sup> I realise that 'the' Masoretic Text is a construct, since there is not any 'one' version of it; see, for instance, E.Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress / Assen: Van Gorcum, 1992). Nevertheless, for practical purposes all scholars know what is meant by MT, and differences between manuscripts may be discussed where they arise. My primary witness to MT is the critical edition of BHS. There are other Hebrew texts of course, some of which we possess. However, in the case of Psalm 68 there are few significant differences from MT. The Dead Sea Scrolls in particular have little to offer in variation from MT with respect to this Psalm. See P.W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (*Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* XVII; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), p91.

<sup>18</sup> One of the motivations behind trying to follow MT where possible is that the tradition it represents is an ancient one which has had huge impact. One would wish to know what can be made of MT, even if one were to judge that it is unlikely to have been the original form of the text.



discussed the alternative in the notes. Only in cases in which I have been very certain that, say, the Ugaritic evidence is convincing, have I adopted such translations.

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# TRANSLATION

- 1 Of the chief musician. Davidic. A Psalm—song.
- 2 God arises; his enemies are scattered  
And those who hate him flee before him!
- 3 As smoke is driven away you drive them,  
As wax melts before fire —  
So the wicked perish before God.
- 4 But the righteous rejoice and exult before God  
And are glad in rejoicing.
- 5 Sing to God! Sing to his name!  
Extol the rider through the desert  
Whose name is Yah, and exult before him!
- 6 Father of the fatherless and judge of widows  
Is God in his holy dwelling.
- 7 God sets the solitary in houses,  
Brings out prisoners into prosperity —  
But the rebellious dwell in parched land.
- 8 O God, when you went forth before your people,  
When you marched through Jeshimon *selah*
- 9 The earth trembled; yea, the heavens gushed forth  
Before God, the One of Sinai,  
Before God, the God of Israel.
- 10 You caused a bountiful rain to fall, O God.  
You strengthened your inheritance —  
Even when it was weary.
- 11 Your flock dwells there;  
In your goodness you prepared for the poor, O God.
- 12 The Lord gives the command —  
Those who bring tidings are a great host.
- 13 Kings of hosts flee, they flee!  
And the beauty of the house will divide the spoil.
- 14 Though you remain between the saddlebags  
The wings of the dove are covered with silver  
And her pinions with green gold.

- 15 When the Almighty scatters kings there  
It snows on Zalmon.
- 16 A mountain of God is mount Bashan  
A many-peaked mountain is mount Bashan.
- 17 Why are you jealous, O many-peaked mountains?  
This is the mountain in which God has desired to rest.  
Yea, the Lord will dwell there for ever.
- 18 The chariotry of God is twice ten thousand, and thousands redoubled.  
The Lord came from Sinai to the sanctuary.
- 19 You ascended on high; you led captivity captive  
You took gifts for man — even the rebellious —  
So that God Yah might dwell.
- 20 Blessed be the Lord —  
From day to day he loads us; God is our salvation. *selah*
- 21 God is to us a God of saving acts  
And to the Lord LORD belongs the exit from death.
- 22 As for God, he will break the head of his enemies,  
The hairy skull of the one who walks in his offences.
- 23 The Lord said, I will bring (him) back from Bashan,  
I will bring (him) back from the depths of the sea.
- 24 That you will dip your foot in blood  
That the tongue of your dogs has its portion from the enemies.
- 25 They saw your processions, O God,  
The processions of my God my King to the sanctuary.
- 26 The princes went before; behind, the musicians  
In the midst of the young women playing timbrels.
- 27 In the assemblies bless God —  
The Lord, from the source of Israel
- 28 There is little Benjamin, leading them.  
The princes of Judah — their throng,  
The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali!
- 29 Command, my God, as befits your strength!  
Strengthen, O God, what you have done for us!
- 30 From your temple at Jerusalem  
Kings will bring gifts to you.
- 31 Rebuke the beast of the reeds!  
The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,

Who submit themselves with pieces of silver.  
Scatter the peoples who delight in battles!

32    Envoys come out of Egypt,  
Cush hastens to stretch out her hand to God.

33    Kingdoms of the earth, sing unto God!  
Play unto the Lord! *selah*

34    Behold, he rides on the heavens, the ancient heavens!  
Lo, he gives his voice, a voice of strength!

35    Ascribe strength to God!  
His glory is upon Israel  
And his power in the heavens.    •

36    How awesome you are, O God, from your sanctuary!  
He is the God of Israel, who gives strength and power to his people.  
Blessed be God!

# TRANSLATION WITH EXTENSIVE NOTES

I now present the consonantal Hebrew text verse by verse,<sup>19</sup> accompanied by my translation which is extensively footnoted. Although these notes may appear exhaustive, they are far from being so. Cataloguing ancient readings, suggested emendations and alternative translations could continue almost indefinitely. This section of the dissertation is intended for reference, and would make for tedious continuous reading. I advise readers to read the body of the dissertation and refer to the notes as and when necessary.

I have sought to provide the following:

- An index to the places in the rest of the dissertation where the passage or crux in question is discussed in more detail.
- A presentation of the interpretative options for crux passages, together with a representative sample of supporters for each, along with my own judgement. This will include:
- A comparison and evaluation of the more significant readings of the ancient Versions (LXX, other Greek versions, Jerome, Syriac and Targum), particular where the translation may suggest a different Vorlage or a different interpretation from MT.<sup>20</sup>
- A representative sample of later readings and translations (for instance early and modern English translations, the work of mediaeval biblical exegetes, etc), particularly where these are suggestive or illuminating, or where they have carried some consensus. I have included one or two 'exotic' or 'bizarre' interpretations for interest.
- A discussion of research in the modern period (this will necessarily include discussion of evidence from comparative Semitics, conjectural emendations, and so on).<sup>21</sup>

In my notes I am indebted to the commentaries and other studies as cited, but especially to Raymond Ortlund's dissertation on Psalm 68<sup>22</sup> which presents a thorough commentary on the

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<sup>19</sup> Verses are of course not always the most helpful way to break down a text into constituent parts. I divide Psalm 68 into stanzas, strophes and lines in p91-125, providing a thorough analysis of each. Since the present section is largely for reference, however, the traditional verse divisions are the most appropriate.

<sup>20</sup> Of course each of the individual versions is worthy of an exegesis in its own right, for they have each made a massive impact on the history of interpretation. Several of them have received such examination in R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985). These versions are of interest to me as witnesses to, and often as attempts to explain, the consonantal Hebrew text.

<sup>21</sup> On emendations, see my earlier comments on p16.



Versions and key medieval Jewish interpreters in their own right, as well as a detailed analysis of several English translations (AV, RSV, NEB). It would be foolish to reinvent the wheel by repeating such commentary, and instead I have sought to mediate some of Ortlund's findings in my own quite different presentation.

Modern authors referred to without a specific title may be found in the *Psalm 68* or *Psalm Commentaries* section of the bibliography. If there is any doubt about the work being referred to a more extensive citation is given.

למנצח לדוד מזמור שיר:

1 Of the chief musician. Davidic. A Psalm—song.

יקום אלהים יפוצו אויביו וינוסו משנאיו מפניו:

2 God arises;<sup>23 24 25</sup> his enemies are scattered<sup>26</sup>

And those who hate him flee<sup>27</sup> before him.

כהגורף עשן חגורף כהמס דוג מפני-אש

יאבדו רשעים מפני אלהים:

3 As smoke is driven away<sup>28</sup> you drive them,

<sup>22</sup> R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68*. I am almost entirely dependent on Ortlund for mediating information on texts in Arabic. I have examined the texts Ortlund deals with in other languages, and have not found any significant points of disagreement with the way he presents his sources.

<sup>23</sup> (v2-4) <tenses>. The interpretation and translation of the imperfects of these verses constitutes a major issue of interpretation which will almost inevitably be coloured by the overall understanding one has of the Psalm (p196). Four options have been suggested:

1. Jussives: 'Let God arise, and his enemies be scattered...!'
2. Future indicatives: 'God will arise...'
3. Present indicatives: 'God arises...'
4. Temporal 'when' clauses: 'When God arises his enemies are scattered...'

I adopt option 3 here because, in contrast to the others, it predetermines the interpretation of the passage rather less (for instance, option 2 encourages an eschatological reading, whereas 3 is relatively neutral). Choosing a tense for these verbs in English translation is a major interpretative decision, and one in which the multivalency of the Hebrew is immediately lost. See p196.

<sup>24</sup> (v2) *arise*. קום is used 26 times in the qal with God as subject. On 24 occasions it refers to God's arising in judgement; the remaining two, Ps 132v8; 2 Chr 6v41, refer to the ark. Both of these associations are relevant here: the verb occurs in a quotation of the ark saying of Num 10v35; the respective fates of righteous and wicked in v2-5 illustrate the results of God's role as judge.

<sup>25</sup> (v2) <insertion>. Rashi, some mediaeval mss., Jerome, LXX and Peshitta have or assume a waw here.

<sup>26</sup> (v2) *scattered*. Another occurrence of this verb in the qal is Gen 11v4, a paradigmatic scattering of God's enemies at Babel. Other occurrences in the Psalter are 18v15 and 144v6 in which God has sent or is encouraged to send lightning and arrows to scatter enemies.

<sup>27</sup> (v2) *scattered ... flee*. פרוץ and נוס occur together only here and in Num 10v35 (p142-144); נוס is common in the Hebrew Bible (161 times), but appears only twice more in the Psalter: 104v7; 114v3,5

<sup>28</sup> (v2) *is driven away*. MT pointing would be appropriate for qal infinitive construct (יָגֹרֵף), and LXX has a corresponding active form. MT consonants suggest a niphal infinitive construct, however, which would parallel הִמָּס in the next line. Most consequently repoint as יִגְרָף (so BHS, K-B3 p637a, etc). The LXX reading is not sufficient basis for assuming a different Vorlage since its reading could be accounted for as a periphrastic translation of MT. The unattested יִגְרָף may be a made-up niphal form

As wax melts before fire —

So the wicked perish before God.

וצדיקים ישמחו יעלצו לפני אלהים וישירו בשמחה:

4 But the righteous rejoice and exult<sup>29</sup> before God

And are glad in rejoicing.

שירו לאלהים זמרו שמו סלו לרכב בערבות

ביה שמו ועלזו לפניו:

5 Sing to God!<sup>30</sup> Sing to his name!<sup>31</sup>

Extol<sup>32</sup> the rider<sup>33</sup> through the desert<sup>3435</sup>

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to create a rhyme with תִּנְדֹּף; as such its meaning and the sound play would be easily recognisable by readers, even if the form were strictly ungrammatical. Compare Ges 51k.

<sup>29</sup> (v4-5) *rejoice, exult, be glad, rejoicing, sing, sing, extol, exult*. v4-5 use seven different roots to express rejoicing before God. These are accumulated to communicate the intensity and all-encompassing nature of the rejoicing. It is unhelpful to distinguish precisely between them; all occur elsewhere within Hebrew Bible, though their distributions are not particularly illuminating for their occurrences here.

<sup>30</sup> (v5) *to God*. It would (just) be possible to take the lamed as a vocative here: 'sing, O gods'. The parallel lameds preceding בִּעְרֹבוֹת רֶכֶב and פָּנָיו later in v5 argue against this reading, which would be against normal usage in any case.

<sup>31</sup> (v5) *sing to his name*. זָמַר and שָׁם intersect again at 2 Sam 22v50; Ps 7v18; 9v3; 18v50; 61v9; 66v3,5; 92v2; 135v3; 149v3.

<sup>32</sup> (v5) *extol*. Two interpretations of סָלַל are possible. One takes it as another synonym for praising and extolling God (perhaps derived etymologically from the idea of 'lifting up' one's voice in song; Rashi cites Job 28v16; Lam 4v2 for this usage). This fits the context admirably, but there are no other examples in the Hebrew Bible where the word has this sense. The metaphorical use of the verb in Prov 4v8 perhaps lends some support, although this is a pilpel form rather than a qal.

The alternative is to understand the verb to mean 'cast up, prepare (a highway/road),' the text encouraging the making of preparations for the coming of YHWH. This has been a relatively common approach recently, eg Eaton, p170, one which integrates well into cultic understandings of the Psalm (perhaps this is a reason for its popularity). Compare N. Tidwell, "The cultic background of Isaiah 40:1-11 [cf Ps 68]" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 3 (1973), p41-54, who examines the cultic function of the *mesillah*. This meaning is supported by Prov 15v19; Isa 57v14; 62v10; Jer 18v15.

LXX supports this second understanding by reading ὁδοποιεω. סָלַל occurs 12 times in total and is handled as follows by LXX: ἐμποιεω in Ex 9v17; καθαρίζω in Is 57v14; ερευνᾶω in Jer 27(50)v26; περιχαράκω in Prov 4v8; ὁδοποιεω in Job 30v12 and here.

The absence of a direct object (that which is to be prepared) is not an argument against the 'prepare (a way)' reading, since in Isa 57v14 it is used without an object in that sense (compare also Isa 40v3). The object can be regarded as implicit. Here סָלַל occurs with the preposition לְ, but there are no other passages with which this usage may be directly compared.

Both of these alternatives fit the context of the Psalm. v4-5 are full of rejoicing, as already noted (option 1); the Psalm begins with a reminder of the ark's journeys through the wilderness and will proceed to describe him as the one who rides through the desert (option 2).

Although I find option 2 attractive, I am inclined to take the safer option of regarding סָלַל as another synonym of rejoicing in this passage. This is because of all the other synonyms in v4-5 and also because when God went through the wilderness, he is spoken of in Num as forging his own path, so to speak, rather than requiring the Israelites to precede him. The angel of God's presence and the pillar of cloud went before God's people, and Psalm 68 itself records how God went out *before* his people. The imagery and context best fits the translation 'rejoice' or 'exult'.

<sup>33</sup> (v5) *rider*. Other texts which refer to God's riding include Deut 33v26; Ps 18v11 (cf 104v3); Is 19v1. רֶכֶב can be understood to mean 'mount' rather than 'ride,' but 'ride' is most appropriate here.



Whose name is<sup>36</sup> Yah,<sup>37</sup> and exult before him!<sup>38</sup>

LXX translates ‘make a way for the one who has mounted (past tense) on the West.’ (for ‘West,’ see following note). This should be compared with εμβαιω for רכב in Ps 17(18)v11. Symmachus follows MT with τω εποχουμενω.

<sup>34</sup> (v5) *desert*. Three options for the meaning of ערבות are of interest for consideration:

1. desert or plains
2. heavens / clouds
3. West

LXX goes for option 3 which can be dealt with summarily. West is used elsewhere in LXX for ערבות (eg Num 22v1), though εν αρβωτ occurs as a transliteration in Num 26v3,63; Deut 34v8; Josh 13v32; 2Kin 17v16; 4Kin 25v5. LXX may have mistaken ערב ‘to be arid’ and ערב ‘to become evening’ (cf KJV of Jer 5v6), and may have perceived a link with v34 in which קדם is translated ‘east’ rather than ‘antiquity’ (LXX’s usual translation of the root).

Option 2 (heavens) has received renewed support since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, though this by no means decides the issue (see following note). The reading ‘heaven(s)’ was known long before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, as exemplified by Tg v5, Midrash (“Like a man riding a horse and guiding it over the plain, the Holy One, blessed be He, rides upon the skies.” (Deut 33v26 is then cited): W.G. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series 13; New Haven: Yale UP, 1959), p539; similarly the mediaeval Jewish exegetes.

Other occurrences of the word in the Hebrew Bible clearly support the meaning ‘plains’ or ‘desert’, however, a sense which also fits the context of Psalm 68 given the opening reference to the journeys of the ark. When a perfectly good Hebrew-internal meaning is available for the word in question, with many supporting passages within the Hebrew Bible, it is unwise to be too easily wooed by alternatives. However, ‘heavens’ would also be appropriate for the context, and would create an inclusio with the reference to the heavens at the close of the Psalm (v34). See following note. B.D. Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p326, argues against a reference to the Exodus on the basis that Israel did not use chariots then and ערבות is not used in connection with the Exodus. His point about chariots may mistake a metaphor for a literal description and fail to appreciate the symbolism of the ark as God’s chariot. On ערבות see further p61-62.

<sup>35</sup> (v5) <Baal epithet ‘rider on the clouds’? >. There is a clear parallel between the epithet for God here, *rkb b’rbt*, and the Baal epithet witnessed in the Ugaritic texts *rkb ‘rpt* (Aqht I:i:43-44; Baal II:iii:10,17). Does the Psalm thus ascribe to Yah one of the epithets of Baal? Many recent translators and commentators have thought so (Albright, “A Catalogue”; Dahood; LePeau, etc), but other equally painstaking studies have rejected the identification (Ortlund and Vlaaderingeboek on 68v5).

Contextual arguments in favour of the identification include the similar Baal language at v34, and the rhetoric of v5 which appears to build up to a climax with the identification of God as one named *Yah* (and hence *not* Baal, surprise, surprise!). LePeau, p81, argues that since ‘*arabot* is nowhere else used in connection with God’s theophanic chariot it is more likely that an allusion to the Baal epithet is being made, but this is an argument from silence, and an unconvincing one.

I think it is highly likely that a deliberate allusion to Baal-language is being made (p182), but would stop short of saying that Psalm 68 is an instance of the Baal epithet being applied to Yahweh. While recognising the clever allusion, I prefer the reading ‘rider through the desert’ because 1) it fits with the context of the Psalm which portrays God’s march from Sinai to Israel; 2) the form in the Psalm is not identical with the Baal epithet (if the parallel is deliberate, why include רב?); 3) the word ערבות is perfectly comprehensible as ‘desert,’ so there is no reason to import a Ugaritic meaning which is not attested elsewhere in biblical Hebrew. See p182.

<sup>36</sup> (v5) *whose name is*. A literal translation would be: ‘by (or according to) his name Yah’, but the phrase is best understood idiomatically. LXX seems to get it right with ‘the Lord is his name’ (cf Ex 15v3) whereas Symmachus and Quinta go back to the more literal rendering.

The use of ׁ may be reminiscent of Ex 3v6 (ׁ *essentiae*); God is to be invoked by the use of his name Yah. See Ges 119hi.

<sup>37</sup> (v5) *yah*. On the name Yah see p50. The link with Ex 15v2,3 may be significant; see p149+.

<sup>38</sup> (v5) <LXX addition>. LXX adds a line here: ‘they will be confounded from the face of him.’ Ortlund, p17-20, suggests two factors that might lie behind this addition. First, it may balance the metre, by providing a verse of three lines, each of which has two members. Second, the addition enables a link with v6. If v6 is divided into two independent clauses (not as in my translation, but rather ‘Father of the fatherless and judge of widows. God is in his holy habitation.’), the first clause can then



אבי יתומים ודין אלמנות אלהים במעון קדשו:

6 Father of the fatherless and judge<sup>39</sup> of widows<sup>40</sup>

Is God in his holy dwelling.

אלהים משיב יחידים ביתה מוציא אסירים בכושרו

אך סוררים שכנו צחיחה:

7 God sets<sup>41</sup> the solitary<sup>42</sup> in houses,

Brings out prisoners into prosperity<sup>43</sup> —

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be linked with the LXX addition to v5 (providing an antecedent, so to speak, for πατρός and κριτού in v6).

Neither of these suggestions seems totally convincing. Perhaps LXX was working from a Vorlage which contained the addition, although it destroys something of the structural neatness of this part of the Psalm, since it reintroduces the enemies who had been summarily dealt with in v2-3. The addition provides another occurrence of the 'before' motif of God's presence (p57-58), and chimes with the final line of v6-7, a passage describing God's goodness to the suffering and unfortunate, which ends with a reference to the rebellious dwelling in desolation.

<sup>39</sup> (v6) *judge*. The form דין occurs only here and in 1 Sam 24v15. A translation of 'vindicator' or 'defender' would also be appropriate.

<sup>40</sup> (v6) *fatherless ... widows*. The two terms orphan/fatherless and widows occur together on a number of occasions: Job 24v3; Ps 109v9; Isa 10v2; Lam 5v3.

<sup>41</sup> (v7) *sets*. This translation is inadequate in that it masks the reference to dwelling, a motif which is key to the Psalm (p57-60). 'God makes the solitary  *dwell* in houses' is cumbersome, however, as would an even more pedantic 'causes to sit'.

<sup>42</sup> (v7) *solitary*. יחידים occurs in the following passages: Gen 22v2,12,16 (of Isaac); Jud 11v34 (of Jephthah's daughter); Ps 22v21; 25v16; 35v17; Prov 4v3; Jer 6v26; Amos 8v10; Zech 12v10. It generally refers to an only son or daughter, although seems to have the more general sense of solitary or lonely in Ps 25v16 and here. Its use in passages which have been interpreted in relation to Christ (Gen 22; Zech 12v10) has led to Christological interpretations of this verse also (cf p254-255).

LXX uses ἀγαπητός in Gen 22; Jer 6v26; Amos 8v10; Zech 12v10, ἀγαπωμενος in Prov 4v3; μονογενής in Jud 11v34; Ps 22v21; 25v16; 35v17, and μονοτροπος here.

Two passages, Is 51v2 and Ez 33v24, are interesting to hear in the context of Ps 68v7. They emphasise that the growth of the Israelites took place from one sole ancestor, Abraham. <sup>43</sup> *Ezekiel's point* is this: if God can do so much for an individual, how much more for a nation? Isaiah considers Abraham's humble origins as an individual and points to the increase God gave him. The purpose of this is to highlight God's ability to glorify desolate Zion.

*made in Ezekiel*

<sup>43</sup> (v7) *into prosperity*. There are four options for בכושרו: God brings out prisoners...

- 1) (Who are...) 'in chains'. So Ibn Ezra, Kimchi and others, from the root קשר, bind, with a כ representing the original ק. B.D. Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p327, has a variant of this idea, though from a different etymology, citing Aramaic כשורא, beam, pole of wood (the prisoners being tied to poles of wood which they had to carry)
- 2) 'In due season' or 'at the appropriate time'. Such a view is espoused by Rashi; the linguistic support for such a translation would be as 3, below. Rashi comments that the time of the Exodus was precisely appropriate for travellers to go forth since it was neither too hot nor too cold.
- 3) 'In(to) prosperity' or 'to success'. This derives כושרו from the root כשר, be advantageous, prosper, succeed (compare כשרון, profit, skill, success, as used in Ecclesiastes; כשר, be fitting appropriate, is common in Rabbinic Hebrew, and occurs in this sense in Ecc 2v21; 4v4; 5v10; 10v10; 11v6; Est 8v5). Rashi also accepted this derivation, understanding 'safe and sound' (the translation of NEB and NJV).
- 4) Some modern scholars have drawn a comparison with Ugaritic *ktrt*, used of women skilled in midwifery and singing! See K-B3, p446a; A. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, p79; P.D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior*, p21; Albright, "A Catalogue", p19; W.F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p82. One can thus translate בכושרו as 'with rejoicing maidens,' and a comparison may be drawn with v12,25. The goddess Koshar was the patron of music and other craft. The relevance of a reference to rejoicing women at this particular point of the text remains unclear (so, for



But the rebellious dwell in parched land.<sup>44</sup>

אלהים בצאתך לפני עמך בצעודך בישמון סלה:

8 O God, when you went forth before your people,

When you marched through Jeshimon<sup>45</sup>

*selah*<sup>46</sup>

ארץ רעשה אף־שמים נטפו מפני אלהים

זה סיני מפני אלהים אלהי ישראל:

9 The earth trembled; yea, the heavens gushed forth<sup>47</sup>

Before God, the One of Sinai,<sup>48</sup>

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example, Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p327), however (unless the verse refers to the Exodus and the reference is to Miriam's rejoicing in Ex 15). The excitement of a possible Ugaritic connection appears to have got the better of scholarly judgement.

The plural form is naturally accounted for in options 1 and 4; in 2 and 3 it can be regarded as a plural of amplification, Ges 124e. The third option appears to fit the context well and has reasonable linguistic support.

<sup>44</sup> (v7) *parched land*. This is the only occurrence of צח־חָה, but related words are: צָחָה, parched, in Isa 5v13; צָח, dazzling, clear, bright in Isa 18v4; Song 5v10; Jer 4v11 (רִוַח צָח); צָחָה in Isa 58v11, drought, parched land; צָחָה, tip, top in Eze 24v7,8 and Neh 4v7; צָחָה be dazzling, bright, white in Lam 4v7.

These terms all appear to be related. A root idea of dazzling brightness has led to derived meanings of drought, parched or scorched land, and hence barrenness. The Syriac term used here means 'clear, bright, powerful,' and may be used of the sunlight. The sense is of something unpleasant or even scorching. LXX translates 'tombs', which, while paraphrase, conveys the implication well enough. It is difficult to find a suitable English equivalent; 'parched land' has its inadequacies, but contrasts nicely with the bounty of God's provision of rain which is to be detailed in v8-11.

<sup>45</sup> (v8) *Jeshimon*. See p62.

<sup>46</sup> (v8) *selah*. On the use of *selah* in Psalm 68 see p129-130.

<sup>47</sup> (v9) *gushed forth*. The regular meaning of נָחַף, 'drip' (cf the noun נֶחֱף, 'drop'), is inadequate for this passage and the associated Jud 5v4, and a meaning of 'gushed,' 'flowed' or even 'spewed' must be assumed. Joel 4v18 likewise requires the meaning 'flowed', a sense not inappropriate for other passages also. The verb is also used several times of the act of prophesying, as the prophet 'drops' words, or as words flow from him (Amos 7v16; Mic 2v6,11).

נָחַף is used intransitively here; in Jud 5v4 it occurs transitively and intransitively, but the intransitive use there is not truly comparable since it occurs as part of a staircase or climactic parallelism construction. Ps 68v9 is thus the only true intransitive occurrence in the qal (for examples with an object, see Joel 4v18; Prov 5v13 etc).

<sup>48</sup> (v9) *one of Sinai*. The options for the expression זֶה סִינִי are:

1. A scribal gloss, identifying the *occasion* with which the glossators identified the verse (the theophany on Sinai as per Ex 19 etc). This is taken as read, for instance, by M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* on 68v9, and many others have seen the term Sinai here a 'definite' secondary imposition. זֶה was certainly widely used in later Hebrew to introduce glosses or to make explanatory comments. Later editors, seeking to clarify or conventionalise Psalm 68 might well have inserted a reference to Sinai so that readers could 'know' what the Psalm was talking about.
2. Take the זֶה as a relative pronoun, equivalent to Arabic *du* and Ugaritic *d* so that God is addressed by the epithet or title '(the) One of Sinai'.
3. Interpret זֶה as an archaic term meaning 'lord' (comparing Arabic *de* or *du*, possessor, lord). See W.F. Albright, *BASOR* 62 (1936), p30; Le Peau, p101; Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p327. I cannot fault the comparative linguistic evidence here, and Mic 5v2, lord of peace, is a probable parallel usage.

All of these have received weighty support in the history of scholarship, and I would not object strongly to any of these options. The structure of the verse appears to me to argue against the gloss reading (option 1), however; I prefer to see the phrase זֶה סִינִי as some form of epithet of God (whether 2 or 3), in parallel with 'the God of Israel' in the following line. For me, Albright and others make a convincing case and I am happy to translate 'lord'. But I would be equally happy with 'One of Sinai'.



Before God, the God of Israel.

גשם נדבות חניף אלהים נחלחך ונלאה אחה כוננחה:

10 You caused<sup>49</sup> a bountiful<sup>50</sup> rain to fall, O God.

You strengthened<sup>51</sup> your inheritance<sup>52</sup> —

Even when it was weary.<sup>53</sup>

חיחך יִשְׁבוּ־בָהּ חֵכִין בְּטוֹבֶחֶךָ לַעֲנִי אֱלֹהִים:

11 Your flock<sup>54</sup> dwells there;

In your goodness you prepared for the poor, O God.

אֲדַנִּי יִחַן־אֹמֵר הַמִּבְשָׁרוֹת צָבָה רַב:

12 The Lord gives the command<sup>55</sup> —

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<sup>49</sup> (v10) < tense >. The past tense seems the most appropriate here, though the imperfect is used. Rashi and others have understood the verb in this manner. For discussion, see “Symposium: The *yiqtol* in Biblical Hebrew” *Hebrew Studies* 29 (1988), p7-42.

<sup>50</sup> (v10) *bountiful*. Interpreters are divided on whether to use an adjective of quantity (such as plentiful), or a more theological term such as gracious (Luther, for instance, chose ‘gnädigen’). ‘Bountiful’ is perhaps a happy medium.

On the abundance of rain in the land see also Deut 11v10-12. Compare 65v10,11.

<sup>51</sup> (v10) *strengthened*. Strengthen can be understood in the sense of ‘make secure’ or ‘establish’, but its sense is governed here by the interpretation of ‘weary’ (see below).

The verb occurs 11 times like this in the polel form, usually of God.

<sup>52</sup> (v10) *inheritance*. It would be possible to take this as an expression for the nation of Israel.

However, the *land* of Canaan is termed God’s inheritance in Ex 15v17; Jer 2v7; Ps 79v1; 2 Macc 2v4 and elsewhere, and the pronoun בָּהּ in v11a can be best understood to relate back to ‘inheritance’ — a reading which implies that ‘inheritance’ = land. This interpretation makes sense in the context and is followed by many including Rashi; the passage can be understood in relation to the settlement of the land. For a discussion of inheritance see A.M. Brown, *The Concept of Inheritance in the Old Testament* (unpublished PhD: Columbia University, 1965), p181-209 discusses the citations of נַחֲלָה which refer to the land of Canaan; cf also p303-6; F.E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together. The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p20-21. Greenspahn argues that if the whole earth is seen to belong to God, the concept that he might reserve a special territorial portion for his chosen child is not an unlikely one. Compare the following discussion on ‘weary’.

For an entirely different (and bizarre!) understanding of this verse in relation to gifts brought by volunteering soldiers, see Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p327-8.

<sup>53</sup> (v10) *weary*. לָאֵה might most naturally be used with respect to people: God’s people are tired and weary, and he strengthens and refreshes them with rain (or manna, if this be thought to be the historical reference behind the passage, p170). If ‘inheritance’ refers to the land then ‘weary’ would adequately describe its languishing condition before rainfall.

LXX uses ἀσθενέω, expanding the metaphor to include God’s ability to heal.

<sup>54</sup> (v11) *your flock*. There are two options here. The first is to translate ‘household’ or ‘congregation’ (KJV); Rashi compares 2 Sam 23v11 and thus translates ‘assembly’ (masculine אֲסִי־פָה); cf 2 Sam 23v13 where the feminine חַיִּית means troop (compare 1 Chr 11v15). The other option is to read ‘living creature’ or ‘beast’ (also recognised by Rashi who thought the congregation of Israel might be described as God’s domesticated beast and his wild beast). LXX and Tg v11 take this view. Nicholas of Lyra pointed out that animals were often symbolic of believers in the Scriptures, and went on to identify the animals in question here as sheep (cited in Ortlund, p344)!

Note that ‘beast’ is singular but ‘dwells’ is plural; LXX translates ζῶα, neuter plural. These clues may support a collective sense such as ‘flock’ or ‘herd’ or ‘race’ (so Bittenwieser, p52).

Compare the later occurrence in v31.

<sup>55</sup> (v12) *command*. The military context suggests this translation rather than the more general ‘word’. BDB p56.



Those who bring tidings<sup>56</sup> are a great host.

מלכי צבאות ידורון ידורון

ונות בית תחלק שלל:

13 Kings of hosts flee, they flee!<sup>57</sup>

And the beauty of the house<sup>58</sup> will divide<sup>59</sup> the spoil.

אם תשכבון בין שפחים כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף

ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ:

14 Though<sup>60</sup> you *lie* between the saddlebags<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup> (v12) *those who bring tidings*. For another example of the process of bringing tidings after a victory at battle, see 2 Sam 18v19+. The use of εὐαγγελίζω in LXX has facilitated Christian interpretations of this verse with reference to preaching, p255.

Translators vary as to whether to give prominence to the female gender of these 'tidings-bearers.' The references to women elsewhere in the Psalm (cf echoes of Ex 15v20,21, p150), along with other passages which refer to female celebrations after battles such as 1 Sam 18v6, suggests that the female gender of the tidings-bearers may be a matter of significance, even if it is difficult to work into an English translation.

Some regard v13-15 as the song which the women brought.

<sup>57</sup> (v13) flee ... flee. Rashi translates: '(may they) surely be removed', seeing the repeated ידורון as equivalent to יחנודרן in Ps 64v9, and regarding both forms as passives. He reads v13-14 with jussive force as a quotation of the message of the tidings-bearers in v12. Midrash (Braude, p541) takes the clause to be of angels rather than kings: 'Hosts of angels did move them, did move them', comparing Ex 20v15.

<sup>58</sup> (v13) *the beauty of the house*. The form נוח can be derived from two sources:

1. from נוה, pasture, abode, dwelling. The predominantly poetic word נוה seems to refer to the abode of shepherds or flocks: Ps 23v2; 65v13; 74v20; 83v13; 93v5; Jer 9v9; 23v10; 25v37; Lam 2v2; Joel 1v19,20; 2v22; Amos 1v2. Compare 2 Sam 7v8; 1 Chr 17v7 (KJV sheepcote).
2. from נאה be beautiful, comely, fitting. In Jer 6v2 it is used as an adjectival noun to refer to a beautiful woman.

These give rise to several possibilities concerning בית:

1. 'the household' (one might translate 'the courtyard of the house' or one might regard the two words combined as an expression meaning 'household'). Rashi, Radak and Ibn Ezra translate 'they of the household,' but understand this to be a reference to the Israelite nation. Alternatively, the words could be understood more literally.
2. the ancient equivalent of the traditional English term 'housewife'. So Rashi, LXX, Vulgate. KJV thus translates: 'she that tarried at home'.
3. the translation 'the beauty of the house' may itself be understood as a reference to Israel or to Zion; cf Jer 6v2.

In short, 'beauty of the house' seems to be an expression either of Israel as a whole, or, more probably in my view, of the domestic part of Israelite society (chiefly the women) which remained at home and kept the fort so to speak while battles were being fought.

<sup>59</sup> (v13) *will divide*. This can be parsed either as 3fsg, she will divide, or 2sg, you will divide. The former is the obvious choice.

<sup>60</sup> (v14) *though* < meaning of verse >. The force of אף has been debated:

1. 'though' (a concessive clause): a) though 'the beauty of the house' has a humble role, yet she will share the spoil with the mightiest of warriors, or, b) 'even though you stayed at home rather than being involved in the battle (as you should have been? some see a rebuke here, as in Jud 5), at least go now and collect some spoils!'
2. 'if' or 'why?': a) 'why remain around the house when there are spoils for the taking on the battlefield?', or, b) as a rebuke (compare Jud 5), 'why have you stayed at home rather than being involved in the battle? spoils have been won, but no thanks to you!'

The passage may thus be seen as a reproof of a recreant instead of militant Israel; it may describe the peace and prosperity awaiting Israel after victories of v12 (as RV); or it may fall between the two: though some may prefer slothful ease, yet Israel once more enjoys blessings of peace and prosperity



The wings of the dove<sup>62</sup> are covered<sup>63</sup> with silver

And her pinions with green gold.<sup>64</sup>

בפרש שרי מלכים בה השלג בצלמון:

15 When the Almighty scatters<sup>65</sup> kings there<sup>66</sup>

because of God's goodness (so Kirkpatrick, p385). I am inclined to this latter view. The passage is too buoyant and inexplicit to be all rebuke, yet the allusion back to Jud 5 (in which the rebuke was explicit) is clear and must be factored into any interpretation. I see a veiled rebuke: Israel could have done better and been more involved even now (let those who celebrate be warned!), but the battle is God's, and even those who would or could not be involved are invited to come to the party.

Buttenwieser observes that if this line (14a) is removed then 14bc naturally reads as a description of the spoils referred to at the end of v13. It is still necessary to explain the text in its present form, however, even if this suggestion makes good sense.

<sup>61</sup> (v14) *saddlebags*. The word שפחים is unique, although suspiciously similar forms are to be found in Eze 40v43; Gen 49v14; Jud 5v16. There are three broad options:

- 1) Saddlebags, panniers (of a donkey). This has been advocated by A.R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship* and K-B3 ('packsaddles'). Eaton, p171, goes one step further, cashing out the verse to mean 'will you lie around like a lazy donkey?'. On spoils and baggage see 1 Sam 30v24,25. The implication would be: 'spoils are there for the taking, but you must go and take/claim them'.
- 2) Fireplace, hearth(stones) or pots, perhaps two piles of stone between which fires are kindled and pots are placed. Albright translates hearthstones, while others think of the cooking vessels which would have been placed there, AV, Ibn Ezra and others taking the sense to be 'pots'.
- 3) Sheepfolds. This is followed by Rashi. He takes the metaphor to refer to those who dwell within the borders of Israel who enjoy the spoils and are thus God's dove (v14). Tournay takes the word to refer to a double muret, two walls forming the entrance to a sheepfold (hence the dual form).

This would continue the animal imagery which has run through several verses.

Tournay's interpretation seems attractive, but the other options are also reasonable. The meaning of the passage is not greatly altered whichever solution one adopts.

<sup>62</sup> (v14) *dove*. What can be made of the reference to a dove? Here are the common suggestions:

1. It is a symbol for Israel, Hos 7v11; 11v11; Ps 74v19. This would require something like 'the wings of the dove...' in English translation. Israel is adorned with the spoils of battle, decorated with costly gold and silver. Barnes, p321, suggests that if the dove is Israel the wings may describe its army: the armies of Israel return laden with silver and gold, the spoil taken from their enemies.
2. The dove may refer to a particularly fine piece of booty left behind by the kings fleeing in defeat, so NEB. LePeau, p116-133,199 suggests that an item of religious significance may be referred to.
3. Take the dove to be plural, a reference to messenger or signal doves, perhaps decorated, released in the victory celebrations at the close of a battle. Such a practice was common in Egypt and in the surrounding Near Eastern nations, and it is quite possible that it may have been used in Israel too. For references see Tate, p179. The singular may be collective.
4. The dove could be a figure of the enemy fleeing in all her glorious splendour, and thus an inducement to Israel to pursue and win the spoils that are hers. So Delitzsch, Hupfeld, Kirkpatrick, Briggs.

Two other options are unlikely, but ought to be mentioned given the intense difficulty of the passage. Weiser thinks of the glory of the Lord manifested in battle, and Kidner, p240-1, looks back to the women of v12b, and sees them depicted here 'peacocking around'. In my view it is impossible to come to a decision with any certainty; options 1 and 3 seem most likely to me.

<sup>63</sup> (v14) *covered*. This is the singular of either the perfect or participle, but since the subject is plural BHS suggests emending to נחפרות, plural participle. Rashi uses the plural of the perfect, suggesting that the singular form is to be understood as a plural; see Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary*, p309 n36. Dahood suggests that נחפרה may be a dual.

<sup>64</sup> (v14) *green gold*. The references to gold and silver are generally taken to refer to spoil. Delitzsch writes of Israel now basking in prosperity, but Kirkpatrick, p384 takes the metallic references to be metaphorical: 'the image of a dove basking in the sunshine – an idyllic condition of peace and prosperity.' A reference to spoils seems much more likely.

The root ירק can mean yellow, but is more usually understood as green (cf BDB). On the doubling compare אדמדם in Lev 13v42, in the context perhaps 'pink'. This may suggest that the doubling is used to refer to lighter colours, hence 'pale green' here.



It snows<sup>67</sup> on Zalmon.<sup>68</sup>

הַר־אֱלֹהִים הַר־בָּשָׁן הַר גְּבוּנִים הַר־בָּשָׁן:

16 A mountain of God<sup>69</sup> is mount Bashan<sup>70</sup>

A many-peaked<sup>71</sup> mountain is mount Bashan.<sup>72</sup>

לְמָה תִרְצֶדוֹן הָרִים גְּבוּנִים הָהָר חֹמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְשִׁבְחוֹ

<sup>65</sup> (v15) *scatters*. On the use of פָּרַשׁ here to mean scatter rather than the usual 'spread out,' see Zech 2v10; Ez 17v21. It is also worth comparing פָּרַשׁ roots 2,3 (BDB, p831), pierce, break (causing bowels to gush out!). This sense would also be appropriate to the passage.

<sup>66</sup> (v15) *there*. If בָּהּ is understood in a conventional sense such as 'there,' 'in it,' or 'on it' it is difficult to identify a referent for the pronoun (could it be Zalmon which follows?). One of the interpretations offered by Rashi is to take the scattering as the 'spreading out' (of the torah) before the kings, 'by which' (= בָּהּ) the kings were made snowy white. Three more likely options present themselves, the first two requiring the dove to be understood as Israel.

1. 'for her (sake)' KJV mg suggests this.

2. 'by her' (the dove), Barnes, p321; but the battle scene emphasises God's activity, not Israel's, and the rebuke of v14 in fact suggests the opposite.

3. take the two כִּי to introduce two clauses of a comparative construction (...כִּי...כִּי); thus Eaton, p172, 'When the Almighty scatters the kings, it is like the falling of snow on Mount Zalmon'.

The first of these, or a simple translation of 'there', seems most probable. For a structural link between this phrase and v8, see p107 on the structure of v15; this may well provide the neatest solution.

<sup>67</sup> (v15) *it snows*. The purpose of the allusion to snow is not quite clear. Radak understands that the dove is as white as the snow on Zalmon, though this has not been widely followed (cited in Ortlund). More probable is that the kings flee like driven snow or that the wreckage of armour on the battlefield lies like glittering snow on a dark peak. More dramatically, others have suggested that the whiteness of stripped carcasses, bones, or the white robes of fallen bedouin are being referred to.

Other biblical references to snow are thin but include Job 38v22; 1 Macc 13v22.

<sup>68</sup> (v15) *Zalmon*. This may be a place name (perhaps near Shechem, Jud 9v48, or Hauran / Jebel Druze), or may be translated as 'dark mountain' (which is probably the meaning even if the mountain near Shechem is meant; cf Rashi's citation of Job 10v21b, זֵלְמוֹן). This provides an attractive contrast with the white snow. See p62.

<sup>69</sup> (v16) *a mountain of God*. The issue here is whether the Psalm is identifying Bashan as a mountain of God (but an insignificant one in comparison to Zion, or perhaps in the sense that all mountains are his but he has chosen a special one), or whether אֱלֹהִים is a quantifier. In this case one would translate 'mighty mountain'; for this use of אֱלֹהִים see Gen 23v6; Ex 8v28; Ps 8v11. אֱלֹהֵי הַר is used in Ps 36v7 ('your righteousness is like the great mountains / mountains of God'), but the parallel is not exact.

<sup>70</sup> (v16) *a mountain of God is mount Bashan*. This may be a comparison between God's hill and mount Bashan: 'the hill of God is as the hill of Bashan' (KJV). But this does not face up to the plain meaning of the Hebrew which clearly makes two statements about mount Bashan in this verse (Ps 36v7 quoted in the previous note uses כִּי to make a comparison as one would expect; there is no such preposition here).

The relevance of Bashan is discussed on p63-64, 183. Perhaps Hermon, the grandest of the mountains of Palestine and the northern boundary of Bashan is intended (Deut 3v18). Bashan has three peaks of nearly equal height, a relevant fact if the translation 'many peaked' for גְּבוּנִים be adopted.

On the Jewish legend of the battle of the mountains, see W.G. Braude, *Midrash*, p542-544.

<sup>71</sup> (v16) *many-peaked*. Many ancient translators adopt the simple 'high mountain' although 'many-peaked' and 'hump-backed' are preferable. Although the term is unique a similar word is found in Lev 21v20 in a list of physical deformities to describe a humpbacked person. The root word obviously means 'peak' or 'hump', and a translation of 'many-peaked' thus makes good sense. Most interpreters take the clause to be a positive comment about mount Bashan. An alternative is possible, however. The meaning could be a derogatory one (see following verse): 'what right do you have to be jealous or to look askance, mount Bashan? You're no true candidate to be God's chosen mountain; you're deformed, excluded by the law!' Perhaps it is possible to retain an ironic or insulting subtext or underhand jibe of this sort while retaining a plain sense of 'many-peaked'.

<sup>72</sup> (v16) <structure>. It is possible to see the four elements of v16 as four vocative expressions; p108.



אֶת־יְהוָה יֵשֶׁב לְנֶצַח:

17 Why are you jealous,<sup>73</sup> O many-peaked mountains?

This<sup>74</sup> is the mountain in which God has desired<sup>75</sup> to <sup>ישב</sup>rest.<sup>76</sup>

Yea, the Lord will dwell there for ever.

רֶכֶב אֱלֹהִים רַב־תַּיִם שְׁנָאן אֶרְנִי בָם סִינִי בִקְדָשׁ:

18 The chariotry<sup>77</sup> of God is twice ten thousand, and thousands<sup>78</sup> redoubled.<sup>79</sup>

The Lord came<sup>80</sup> from Sinai<sup>81</sup> to the sanctuary.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>73</sup> (v17) *jealous*. רָצַר is a hapax, probably meaning 'watch enviously, maliciously' and by implication 'be jealous'. KJV assumes רָצַר has the same meaning as רָקַד in Ps 114v4,6, translating 'leap'.

An alternative to the translation adopted here is to regard the second רָצַר in this verse as an object: 'O many-peaked mountains, why do you eye the mountain God has chosen to rest in?'

<sup>74</sup> (v17) *this*. The irony of the passage is that the identity of the mountain is not specified (the translation is artificial in this sense since no word corresponding to 'this' occurs in the Hebrew)! Reading canonically and taking seriously the later reference to Jerusalem, I take the mountain to be Zion – but the text does not say. It could be Sinai, or some other mountain – it could even be Bashan! On the vital interpretative significance of this point see p107.

<sup>75</sup> (v17) *has desired*. Compare Ps 132v13. For the New Testament expression of the sort of principle being enunciated here, compare 1 Cor 1v26-29.

<sup>76</sup> (v17) *rest*. An infinitive construct of יָשַׁב, seat or dwelling place; one could translate 'this is the mountain which God has desired for his seat.' Others reposit as a form of שָׁבַח, to rest. Both have attractive associations; God has completed his march through the wilderness, conquered the land, and now sits down or rests on the holy mountain he has chosen. יָשַׁב carries mythological associations of God taking his place at the head of the council of gods; שָׁבַח would take the reader back to early Genesis and the work of creation. יָשַׁב requires no modification of the text, however, and is to be preferred on that score.

<sup>77</sup> (v18) *chariotry*. The singular 'chariot' may be emended to a plural form. However, there is some evidence for retaining the singular and translating 'chariotry': 2 Kin 6v17 etc. This certainly makes more sense than 'chariot'. Another alternative is to regard the entire angelic host as the Lord's (one) chariot throne.

<sup>78</sup> (v18) *thousands*. Compare the repetition in Dan 7v10.

<sup>79</sup> (v18) *redoubled*. The aleph in the unparalleled form שְׁנָאן can be deleted by an assumption of dittography in an unpointed text which would have read שְׁנֵאֲנֵי. See Ges 97h. There are a number of possibilities:

1. My translation assumes the root שָׁנָה, repeat, do again (hence: double, reiterate), in the sense of 'many thousands.'
2. Albright's proposal was to assume a root שָׁנָה and to compare the Ugaritic *tnn*, a class of archers/warriors who accompanied the chariots. This has attracted a lot of support, and seems entirely reasonable, giving rise to a translation 'thousands of warriors.'
3. Yet another option is Eerdman's suggestion (*Psalms*, p329) of utilising the root שָׁנָה, to sharpen (compare שֵׁן, tooth). He thinks of chariots with 'teeth' or scythes.
4. Retaining the aleph, one could derive the form from the root שָׁנָה, to shine, assuming the final nun to be a plural suffix. 'The bright ones' might refer to angelic members of the divine army, a reading which seems to underlie Tg v8 which mentions angels (hence AV). LXX and Vulgate read 'thousands of joyous ones.'

The most likely options appear to be the first two.

<sup>80</sup> (v18) *came*. MT reads 'the Lord is among (or with) them...' With others (eg RSV, NEB) I have moved the mem of מִן to the front of מִן־יְיָ and inserted אֶ, to read instead 'the Lord came from Sinai to the sanctuary'. This is a much easier reading which fits the context well. The misplacement of one letter and the loss of an aleph is a relatively small scribal error to have crept in.

<sup>81</sup> (v18) *Sinai*. In the translation given, the occurrence of Sinai presents no problems. However, if MT be retained, Sinai here is best explained as in v8/9: either as a gloss (Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p329, as an explanation of the place referred to in v17), or as a divine title/epithet. If the latter view is correct, then this is a more startling passage than v8, since Sinai is being used as if it were God's name (so Weiser).



עליה למרום שביה שבי לקחת מחנוות באדם

ואף סוררים לשכן יה אלהים:

19 You ascended on high;<sup>83</sup> you led captivity<sup>84</sup> captive

You took<sup>85</sup> gifts for<sup>86</sup> man — even the rebellious —

So that God Yah<sup>87</sup> might dwell.<sup>88</sup>

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Another option is that the text is locating Sinai in the sanctuary (at Jerusalem). Kidner, p241,2, understands the passage in this kind of way, 'where God is, there is Sinai'. This of course carries the same implication as the translation I have adopted. Kirkpatrick's comment, p387, applies equally to both understandings: 'The glory and majesty which were revealed at Sinai are now transferred to God's new abode'.

<sup>82</sup> (v18) *sanctuary*. שֶׁקֶד might equally well be understood in the following ways:

1. in holiness, splendour; sublimity or grandeur (so Battenwieser, p35)
2. to the sanctuary / holy place
3. with holy ones (this text is as good a place as any for understanding the singular in this way, see BDB p872)

I opt for the second since it fits well with what I perceive to be the theological agenda of the Psalm. Against this, see Battenwieser, p35.

<sup>83</sup> (v19) *ascended on high*. Compare Ps 47v6 for the ascension of God; Jer 31v12 shows a similar use of מָרוֹם with explicit relation to Zion. Compare Isa 24v21+ in which God destroys 'the high ones which are on high', as well as those on the earth, and takes them into captivity (v22).

<sup>84</sup> (v19) *captivity*. Most translate 'captives' but for me the image of captivity itself being taken captive (an equally legitimate translation) is more powerful than the ownership of captives simply changing hands. Compare Isa 24v21 as in the previous note. In Deut 21v10-13 women captives of vanquished peoples are delivered into more 'pleasant' captivity.

<sup>85</sup> (v19) *took*. Syriac ('you gave gifts to the sons of men'), Tg v19, and Eph 4v8 read 'gave' or 'divided' here, but an emendation or an assumption of a different Vorlage is unwarranted. The Tg reading (on which Paul may have been dependent) may reflect a deliberate transposition of the letters לקח into חלק, a root which already appears in MT Psalm 68v13. The translation of 'received gifts' can be integrated well into a Mosaic reading of this section; see p253-254. A Davidic typology is also possible, p252.

<sup>86</sup> (v19) *for man*. The sense of the preposition ל here is troublesome. Here are four options:

1. 'For men' (God takes gifts to give to men). God does not keep the captives for himself, but passes them on, as it were, for the benefit of others. Cf Gen 18v28; Lev 26v39; Deut 9v4,5 etc.
2. 'From men' (God takes gifts/spoil (for himself or others) from men, presumably those he has taken captive earlier in the verse. This utilises a meaning of ל more prominent in Ugaritic (so Dahood).
3. 'As (consisting of) men' (*beth essentiae*). Men are the gifts which are given, giving a translation such as 'received men as gifts'. Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p329, thinks of captives brought to Jerusalem and employed as temple slaves. Goulder thinks of human sacrifices being offered to God ('Thou hast received offerings consisting of men'), p203-205.
4. 'In exchange for men' might just be possible, God trading the lives of the rebellious, as it were, in exchange for gifts for his faithful people (BDB p90a, point 3). In some constructions, the preposition seems to have an instrumental sense, 'at the cost of, by means of': Gen 30v16; Ex 34v20; 1 Kin 2v23; Lev 27v10 etc.

I am not entirely convinced by any one of these above the others; it is perhaps true that 2 and 3 have the most linguistic support.

<sup>87</sup> (v19) *God Yah*. This could be taken as a vocative. Compare the following note for alternative arrangements of these lines.

<sup>88</sup> (v19) *dwell*. An alternative sense for שָׁכַן is 'accept, submit' (compare the root in Ugaritic and Syriac), giving the sense 'even the rebellious accepted Yah' or, 'even the rebellious submit, O God Yah'. God has ascended on high and put the rebellious under tribute.

Retaining the more probable sense of 'dwell', there are still a number of possibilities. This is because it is not clear from the text whether it is the rebellious who will now dwell (whether willingly or unwillingly), or whether it is God who is doing the dwelling. I have chosen the latter because of the dominance of the theme of God's dwelling throughout the Psalm (p57-60, 109). It would be somewhat strange for this climactic section of the poem to conclude with the dwelling of the rebellious, for these



ברוך אדני יום יום יעמס־לנו האל ישועחנו סלה:

20 Blessed be the Lord —

From day to day he loads<sup>89</sup> us; God is our salvation.<sup>90</sup>

*selah*

האל לנו אל למושעות וליהוה אדני למוח חוצאות:

21 God is to us a God of saving acts<sup>91</sup>

And to the Lord <sup>גם</sup> ~~LORD~~<sup>92</sup> belongs the exit<sup>93</sup> from death.

אך־אלהים ימחץ ראש איביו קדקד שער מחהלך באשמיו:

22 As for God,<sup>94</sup> he will<sup>95</sup> break<sup>96</sup> the head of his enemies,

---

are the very ones God scatters at the opening of the Psalm. It would be possible to see 'rebellious' as a reference to stubborn Israel, however.

LXX opts for the reading I have suggested (that is, the passage is about God's dwelling). One possibility is: 'even the stubborn (are content) that *Yah elohim* should dwell among them'.

<sup>89</sup> (v20) *he loads us*. The verb עָמַס may be taken in three senses:

1. he carries/bears us. Isa 46v3 (qal passive); so Aquila, Symmachus, Jerome and Tg. For parallel imagery with נָסַע see Ex 14v4, 19v4; Deut 1v31; Ps 28v9; 2nd Isa 63v9 (also with נָטַל).
2. he loads us (up) cf Gen 44v13 (qal); 1 Kin 12v11 (hiphil); 2 Chr 10v11 (hiphil); Neh 13v15 (qal). Although it is burdens which are being laden in these passages, the Psalm 68 context would assert that blessings are being laden upon us by God.
3. he bears (our) burdens (for us) Neh 4v11 (qal).

All three would fit the context and be acceptable translations; the second option has most support from the use of עָמַס elsewhere. An echo of the Egyptians loading the departing Israelites with spoils for their departure could even be seen.

<sup>90</sup> (v20) *God is our salvation*. The construction הָאֵל יְשׁוּעָה־נּוּ is ungrammatical as a construct chain since nouns in the construct state do not take the article. The article on אֵל could be deleted since w and h were often confused in paleo-Hebrew, allowing 'our saving God' to stand as the subject of the line. The alternative is to assume a separate clause as I have done: 'God (is) our salvation.'

<sup>91</sup> (v21) *saving acts*. An otherwise unattested form which in some respects resembles a hiphil participle though it is a feminine plural noun. It is possible that the feminine plural is used to create sound play with the word חוֹצְאוֹת in the following clause (compare the similar technique of using modified and unparalleled forms for sonic effect in v2). The general meaning of the phrase is clear enough, although the repetition of divine names in v20-21 is overbearing and cumbersome.

<sup>92</sup> (v21) *Lord, Lord*. While יְהוָה אֲדֹנִי occurs around 290 times in the Hebrew Bible (mostly in Isa, Ez, Jer and Amos), יְהוָה אֲדֹנִי which occurs here is rare. Its other occurrences are Ps 16v2; 109v21; 140v8; 141v8; Hab 3v9. Of these, the two words belong to two separate clauses in Ps 16v2, meaning that there are only four other examples of the construction outside Psalm 68.

<sup>93</sup> (v21) *exit*. The plural occurs elsewhere only in Prov 4v23 where the חוֹצְאוֹת of *life* (rather than death as in Psalm 68) are discussed: 'keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life' (so KJV; NKJV is similar '...spring the issues of life', RSV 'flow the springs of life'). LXX translates ἐξοδοί for the Proverbs passage and δεξιοδοί for Psalm 68, and the very use of this term conjures up possibilities for allusive interpretation. The Exodus became a classic illustration of the way-out from death over which God was master.

Both this term and the previous מוֹשְׁעוֹת are cast in the plural (see previous note). Kidner, p243, suggests that this is to convey the repeated occurrence, richness and scope of the salvation of God. There are several options for the translator, though none significantly change the meaning of the verse. Should one translate a singular or plural term? Should a term such as 'outcomings' be conjured, or is 'exit' or 'way-out' more appropriate? Eaton (p172) offers 'expulsion of'. Whatever is adopted, the verse puts God in control of death, and, by implication, who goes in and who comes out. Given the mythological background, one might imagine death as God's enemy (compare Baal and Mot) over whom he exerts control, decreeing even his comings and goings.

For related imagery elsewhere compare Ps 18v20 (also using יָצָא), and 1 Cor 10v13 (God makes a way out, ἐκβασις, from trial and temptation).

<sup>94</sup> (v22) *as for God*. Note the emphatic position of elohim.



The hairy<sup>97</sup> skull of the one who walks in his offences.

אמר אדני מבשן אשיב אשיב ממצלות ים:

23 The Lord said, I will bring (him) back<sup>98</sup> from Bashan,<sup>99</sup>

I will bring (him) back from the depths<sup>100</sup> of the sea.

למען חמחץ רגלך בדם לשון כלבין מאיבים מניהו:

24 That you will dip<sup>101</sup> your foot in blood

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<sup>95</sup> (v22) *he will <tense>*. Ortlund argues that this ought not to be a future tense. Rather these verses are to be understood as an exhortation on the basis of what has been asserted/expounded in v2-19. A present tense, as in v2+, would of course be perfectly acceptable.

<sup>96</sup> (v22) *break*. The occurrences of *מחץ* are instructive, since they single out many of the key 'divine warrior' texts of the Hebrew Bible; it is almost as if this word were a key part of the genre. The references are: Num 24v8,17; Deut 32v39; 33v11; Jud 5v26; 2 Sam 22v39; Job 5v18; 26v12; Ps 18v39; 68v22, 24?; 110v5,6; Isa 30v26; Hab 3v13. Many of these texts are ones singled out in Chapter 3.2 as being heavily alluded to in Psalm 68. Hab 3v13-14 provides a close parallel to v21-22.

<sup>97</sup> (v22) *hairy skull*. There is some biblical evidence that warriors left their hair uncut, perhaps in dedication (compare the Nazirite vow): Jud 5v2; Deut 32v42. Eaton, p172, sees here a subtle allusion to the demonic character of the enemy (Hebrew *שַׁעִיר*, satyr, demon, Is 34v14; 13v21; 2Chr 11v15; cf *שַׁעַר*, bristle with horror).

<sup>98</sup> (v23) *bring (him) back*. The opacity of the original which lacks an unambiguous object may be deliberate (p196-199; here 197). If the standard translations of 'bring back' or 'cause to return' be adopted one can make two possible assumptions about the object. Either: a) God is bringing back his people from some location where they have been scattered or to which they have wandered, or b) God is bringing back his enemies, whether to search out and destroy them, or to bring them back to himself for the purpose of saving them.

The progression into v24 supports b: God brings his enemies back from where they have fled, and the purpose of this (*למען*) is so that Israel ('you') may prey upon them. Such an interpretation also fits well with the violent images of destruction in v22.

However, the imagery of God bringing back from the depths of the sea invites thoughts of the Exodus and crossing of the Red Sea, not to mention Canaanite conquests of Yamm and the forces of chaos. Both of these allusions would support the understanding that God is rescuing his people in these verses rather than searching out enemy peoples (bringing from Bashan might even be a reference to winning wayward Israelites back from Baal apostasy; compare v16+ in which Zion's superiority to Bashan, perhaps Hermon, is asserted).

Both seem legitimate positions; I prefer the second because of the apparent alternating patterns in this part of the poem which suggest that v23 is concerned with God's favours upon his own people rather than his destructions in battle. Fokkelman, p77, by contrast points to the repetition of *אֲשִׁיב* in this verse and compares it with the earlier repetition of *יְדוּחָן*. If this comparison is valid it would suggest that v23 refers to enemies. Fokkelman has an attractive point; as he notes, 'the whole poem has no room at all for a first defeat or crisis at Israel's side.' (p77).

Other options have also been suggested. In late Hebrew *הִשִּׁיב* means 'make an answer,' and one might translate 'repay' or 'strike back'.

<sup>99</sup> (v23) *Bashan*. A number of scholars link the Hebrew *בִּשְׁן* with Ugaritic *bṯn*, serpent. This would parallel well with the second line concerning the depths of the sea and Ugaritic texts concerning Baal's battle with Yamm. See p182-187 and references there for a discussion of Canaanite myth in Psalm 68, and a more detailed treatment of this particular verse. It should be noted that this verse is understandable without the mythological references. Whether it be from the height of Bashan (cf v16,17 and also biblical references to Og king of Bashan), or from the very depths of the sea (the Egyptians?), God can find out his enemies or bring back his people.

<sup>100</sup> (v23) *depths*. *מַצְלוֹת* may be translated depths or shady places; it occurs in the singular at Zech 1v8. cf Amos 9v3 ('wie dort die Höhe des Karmelgebirges und die Meerestiefe also höchster und tiefster Zufluchtsort vor Jahwe Flüchtender genannt werden...'; Schmitt, p129). There are possible mythological links here, as discussed on p183.

<sup>101</sup> (v24) *dip*. *מִחָץ* appears to be an error for *רָחַץ* (a possible reduplication from v22), in the sense of dip (in blood) or wash off (blood from the feet; RSV 'bathe'). Tg and Peshitta support the latter



- That the tongue of your dogs has its portion<sup>102</sup> from the enemies.  
ראו הליכותך אלהים הליכות אלי מלכי בקדש:
- 25 They<sup>103</sup> saw your processions,<sup>104</sup> O God,  
The processions of my God my King to the sanctuary.<sup>105</sup>  
קדמו שרים אחר נגנים בחור עלמות חופפות:
- 26 The princes<sup>106</sup> went before; behind, the musicians  
In the midst of<sup>107</sup> the young women playing timbrels.<sup>108</sup>  
במקהלות ברכו אלהים יהוה ממקור ישראל:
- 27 In the assemblies<sup>109</sup> bless God — .  
The Lord, from the source<sup>110</sup> of Israel

understanding. The closest parallel is Ps 58v11 which similarly speaks of washing one's feet in the blood of enemies.

If מחץ is retained it could be taken in the sense of 'erase' (compare its usual meaning smite, exterminate, annihilate, as in v22). NKJV retains מחץ and translates: 'that your foot may crush them in blood'.

<sup>102</sup> (v24) *portion*. There are two ways of understanding מַכֵּי. One possibility is that the underlying word is מֶנֶן (a hapax, from a root מָנַן meaning 'portion', as RSV; NKJV; Ges 103m: 'portion from enemies'; Barnes, p323: 'As for the tongue of thy dogs, its portion is from thine enemies.' An alternative which amounts to the same thing is to make a link to the root מָנַה, again meaning part, portion (Ex 29v26; 1 Sam 1v4,5 etc), perhaps amending (or assuming equivalence) to מִנְהוּ from the related form מִנְחָה (Neh 12v44,47; Ps 11v6; 63v11 etc); see Gen 95n and BDB p584.

However, מִן may be a simple preposition with an irregular or archaic pronominal suffix 'from off it' or 'thereof', a usage which is found in Job 4v12. It would be difficult to know how to translate the verse if this were the case, and the consensus 'portion', though still clumsy, seems the safest option.

<sup>103</sup> (v25) *they*. The logical antecedent for this is the enemies of v22.

<sup>104</sup> (v25) *processions*. On cultic background, see p244-249. Like the English 'way', הִלִּיכָה may have a literal or a figurative meaning (Prov 31v27, the ways of her house). It occurs five times; in Job 6v19 it has a military sense of 'troop' or 'company' and a military sense fits both Nah 2v6 and the present passage also. In Prov 31v27 and Hab 3v6 'ways' is the meaning, and this sense works in Psalm 68 also even though it is not the most likely in the context.

<sup>105</sup> (v25) *sanctuary*. The same ambiguity surrounds the root קִדֵּשׁ here as it did in its earlier occurrences. Given the processional context, 'sanctuary' seems the best translation, but it would also be possible to translate 'in splendour' (cf Ex 15v11) or 'among (the) holy ones'.

<sup>106</sup> (v26) *princes*. Probably a musical rather than a military or political term – witness the two other musical roles in the verse. So Auffret, p13.

<sup>107</sup> (v26) *in the midst of*. The construct of הֵן implies that the princes and musicians are surrounded by the women who dance around them. RSV has 'between them' and KJV and NKJV 'among them'.

<sup>108</sup> (v26) *playing timbrels*. Participle of the root תַּכָּה, bang on drum. Nah 2v8 is the only other occurrence; it refers to the beating of the breast in mourning.

<sup>109</sup> (v27) *assembly*. Assemblies, congregations and great congregation (eg RSV) are the common translations. The masculine plural מִקְהָלִים occurs in Ps 26v12, but there are no other occurrences. Other forms of the root קָהַל are of course common.

<sup>110</sup> (v27) *source*. The meaning of מִקְוֶה is plain: fountain, source or spring; but how is the image to be decoded, and what is to be made of the prefixed מ?

A simple option is to regard it as an adverbial phrase of location: the processions of God begin at the Gihon spring at the foot of the temple mount; so Eaton, p173; Schmidt, p130, who cites Ps 110v7 and later practices as outlined in Isa 12v13 and *Mishnah Sukkoth* V. Compare the use of מִן to describe the praising of God from a particular location in Ps 118v26; 135v21).

AV's 'ye that are of the fountain of Israel' follows Tg v27, Midrash, Saadya, Rashi, Ibn Ezra etc. It understands מִקְוֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל as an expression for the descendants of the patriarch Jacob. Deut 33v28; Is



שם בנימן צעיר רדם שרי יהודה רגמחם

שרי זבלון שרי נפחלי:

28 There is little<sup>111</sup> Benjamin, leading them<sup>112</sup>

The princes of Judah — their throng,<sup>113</sup>

The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali!<sup>114</sup>

צוה אלהיך עוזך עוזה אלהים זו פעלח לנו:

29 Command, my God, as befits your strength!<sup>115</sup>

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48v1; 51v1,2; Ps 22v24 show that similar idioms are used for the nation sprung from the patriarch Jacob through his sons.

An alternative genetic understanding is to regard the two mems as accidental reduplication and take the whole clause as 'The Lord (is) the source/fountain of Israel' (that is, he is the one who has brought them into being and given them life; he is their progenitor and sustainer). For this sense see Jer 2v13; 17v13; cf Ps 36v10.

These genetic understandings are supported by the usage of מקור elsewhere. In Lev 12v7 and 20v18 the term is used in relation to female discharges. Furthermore, דם מקור became a term for the womb in post-biblical Hebrew. The term is also used of male potency in Prov 5v18. This interpretation for Psalm 68 is strengthened by the partial tribe-list which is to follow in v28. Isa 58v12 and Eze 27v14 should also be compared. Midrash has a variant of this idea: 'the fountain of Israel refers to embryos in the wombs of their mothers'; Braude, p547.

In my view the two genetic interpretations are both viable options. I prefer the former (Jacob / Israel as the progenitor) as this meshes nicely with the partial list of his sons which is to follow. But there is also an attraction in the simplicity of Eaton's proposal that a literal spring is referred to at which the festal processions held centre stage. Gihon seems a sensible option in this case.

Dahood, followed by Carniti, p39 suggests מקור is a liturgical term for a convocation.

<sup>111</sup> (v28) *little*. This may mean in size, importance or age, but given Saul's kingship and the sharing of Jerusalem between Benjamin and Judah only the former and latter of these are appropriate. Age is perhaps the sense in Gen 25v23 and Job 32v6 (although Elihu adds 'in years' here) and would fit Benjamin as Jacob's youngest (cf LXX νεωτερος; Midrash). But Benjamin was also a small tribe. Other occurrences are Micah 5v1 and Ps 119v141; in both passages smallness carries a derogatory implication.

Some Christian interpreters of the verse have suggested that the apostle Paul, apparently short in stature and 'born out of due time', is being singled out by this expression!

<sup>112</sup> (v28) *leading them*. The standard meaning of לך is rule or reign, although a translation such as lead would seem more probable in the context.

Midrash of Psalms refers to a tradition concerning Benjamin's jumping first into the sea (cf ד' דם, braved the sea, rather than דם); Judah then began to pelt Benjamin with stones, hence the following use of רגמחם; this is a rather ingenious, if improbable, way of explaining the verse! See Braude, p547.

<sup>113</sup> (v28) *their throng*. This term is a hapax and translations are varied. AV has council, RSV throng, NKJV company. LXX opts for ηγεμων, ruler.

As to derivation, the closest biblical Hebrew root is רגם, kill by stoning. רגמה may mean heap (of stones), and a possible derived sense might be crowd (of people); but this seems to fit the context poorly; the only possibility is to discern a reference to Judahite skill with the sling (cf 1 Sam 17v49,50). 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarship typically emended to רגשה, Ps 64v3 (cf רגש, throng, in Ps 55v15 and רגש, be in tumult Ps 2v1). So Hupfeld, Perowne, Cheyne (cf BDB, p921, and note suggestions for Ps46v6; Isa 17v12).

If this is correct, the 'throng' of the princes of Judah may be set against 'little' Benjamin; the interpretation of the pronominal suffix is troublesome.

<sup>114</sup> (v28) *Benjamin, Judah, Zebulun, Naphtali*. On the tribal list see p52-54.

<sup>115</sup> (v29) ~~your God has ordained your strength~~. A translation of MT as it stands would read 'Your God has ordained (or sent forth) your strength' (pointing צוה as perfect). This could perhaps be regarded as a statement by the princes of the tribes or by the temple singers, followed by an antiphonal response by the community in 29b: 'Strengthen, O God, what you have done for us'. In this way the verse would

Command,  
O my God,  
as befits

Strengthen,<sup>116</sup> O God, what you have done for us!

מהיכלך על-ירושלם לך יובילו מלכים שי:

30 From<sup>117</sup> your Temple at<sup>118</sup> Jerusalem

Kings will<sup>119</sup> bring gifts<sup>120</sup> to you.

גער חית קנח עדה אבירים בעגלי עמים

מחרפם ברצי-כסף בור עמים קרבות יחפצו:

31 Rebuke<sup>121</sup> the beast of the reeds!<sup>122</sup>

The herd of bulls with the calves<sup>123</sup> of the peoples,

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provide two tiny snippets of the worshipping community described in the previous verses. The next part of the Psalm could be regarded as a continuation of the prayer of 29b:

My translation breaks up the text differently as **צוה אלהי כעוץ** and points **צוה** as imperative:

‘command, my God, as befits your strength’ (alternatively, ‘according to your strength’). RSV, LePeau and Eaton, p173 adopt a similar strategy, one which chimes well with the imperative in the next line and which results in easier Hebrew than MT. The ancient versions also assume such repointing of the initial verb: LXX, Vulgate, Symmachus, Jerome (some mss.), Syriac, Tg v29; cf 42v8; 44v4.

<sup>116</sup> (v29) *strengthen*. RV mg offers the alternative: ‘be strong, O God, thou that hast wrought for us’ (similarly RSV ‘show thy strength, O God, thou who has wrought for us’. Kirkpatrick, p393, offers ‘shew thyself strong as in time past’. Compare Isa 26v12.

<sup>117</sup> (v30) *from*. The preposition **מן** is troublesome; there are a number of strategies for dealing with it.

1. One might stretch its usual meaning of ‘from’ into a term of location or motion towards.
2. Barnes, p324 and Kirkpatrick, p393,4 link **מהיכלך** to the end of the preceding line. Kirkpatrick’s translation is thus: ‘shew thyself strong, thou who hast wrought for us, out of thy temple. Up to Jerusalem shall kings ...’. He points out that the pausal form of ‘temple’ looks like the trace of a tradition that the verses were once so divided, and cites 20v2; 50v2 etc. Tate, p261, adopts a similar strategy: ‘Shew your strength, O God, which you have exercised for us, / from your temple at Jerusalem. / Let kings bring gifts to you!’
3. Translate as ‘because of’, cf Isa 2v2+; Hag 2v7+.

The second of these is perhaps the easiest, although it does leave 30b as a short line on its own.

<sup>118</sup> (v30) *at*. The choice of preposition is again somewhat troublesome. Above or upon does not seem to make sense (unless the temple is thought of as overlooking the city of Jerusalem, or if a heavenly temple is intended). ‘At’ seems the most sensible.

<sup>119</sup> (v30) *will < tense >*. A case could perhaps be made to take this verb as a jussive because of the surrounding imperatives.

<sup>120</sup> (v30) *gifts*. Gifts or tribute; other occurrences are Ps 76v12; Isa 18v7.

<sup>121</sup> (v31) *rebuke*. The term means scold, rebuke, reprimand when it is used of man (Gen 37v10; Jer 29v27; Ruth 2v16); it is stronger when it is used of God (Isa 17v13; 54v9; Nah 1v4; Ps 9v6; 106v9; 119v21). AV, RSV, NKJV opt for rebuke. ‘Scatter’ and ‘destroy’ are other attested translations.

<sup>122</sup> (v31) *beast of the reeds*. Ibn Ezra seems to have originated the interpretation ‘company of spearmen’ which is followed by AV but remains unlikely (the evidence is as follows: the equivalent root to **קנה** can denote a spear-shaft in Arabic, and **קהל** seems to denote a community in 2 Sam 23v13; cf Notes on v11 and BDB p312). RSV, NKJV opt for plural beasts. The best option appears to be to follow the singular form for beast but to recognise the collective sense of **קנה**: ‘beast of the reeds’ (although compare the collective sense of ‘flock’ in v11).

The question is how the imagery is cashed out. Some have thought of the crocodile or hippopotamus being used as a nickname for Egypt (Kidner, p244; Kirkpatrick, p394; cf Ez 32v2; Job 40v21). If a specific nation is sought as a referent, Egypt does seem appropriate enough given the references in the surrounding verses. It is also likely that mythological associations are being toyed with; see p184.

<sup>123</sup> (v31) *bulls ... calves*. The construct chain ‘calves of peoples’ is a genitive of explanation or apposition (cf Ges 128 l; Jer 46v20,21 RV).

There seems to be a downward progression in terms of the hostility or exotic nature of beasts singled out: the beast of the reeds ... bulls ... calves. This has led some expositors to think of a particular leader or power for the best of the reeds, and then of hostile peoples great and small for the bulls and



Who submit<sup>124</sup> themselves with pieces<sup>125</sup> of silver.

Scatter<sup>126</sup> the peoples who delight in battles!

יֵאָחִיר חֲשֹׁמִיִּים מִנִּי מִצְרַיִם כּוֹשׁ חֲרִיץ יָדָיו לֵאלֹהִים:

32 Envoys<sup>127</sup> come out of Egypt,

Cush<sup>128</sup> hastens to stretch out<sup>129</sup> her hand<sup>s</sup> to God.

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calves, of the leaders and the led so to speak — or of a progression king — army princes / trained troops — people *en masse* (for instance Barnes, p324 for the latter).

There is a deliberate mixing of human and animal language (p116). Bulls are joined together in an עֹדָה, a congregation or gathering (LXX συνάγωγη); the calves or bullocks are not animals but rather calves of peoples. Compare P.D. Miller, “Animal Names as Designations in Ugaritic and Hebrew” *UF* 2 (1970).

<sup>124</sup> (v31) *submit themselves*. I take this to be hithpael of כָּפַס, stamp down. Either it refers back to the people of the previous line who submit themselves with pieces of silver (hence hithpael; cf Prov 6v3, self-trampling), or, God himself is the subject and he tramples underfoot the silver, spurning the tribute (Kirkpatrick, p394; or, spurning those who delight in money, for which see following note). There is considerable variation amongst the Versions suggesting that the text may be corrupt. Detail and alternatives which I will not repeat are provided in Tate p169 note 31b. For my understanding of the structure of the verse, see p116. That structural analysis gives rise to two options:

- 1) God is rebuking some of those who are coming with tribute (perhaps because their approach is grudging and they are only coming by being forced), hence the translation given: ‘rebuke ... the herd ... who submit with pieces of silver ...’.
- 2) God is rebuking the herd and the calves *until they* submit with pieces of silver. That sense of ‘until’ has to be supplied by the context, and is adopted by Tate, p169.

Carniti, p40-41 and Auffret, p15, regard this expression as a critique of idolatry, which is an attractive option given the context: “Il significato dell’espressione resta incerto, ma sembra probabile un’allusione all’idolatria”, Carniti, p40.

<sup>125</sup> (v31) *pieces*. There are various alternatives for this expression:

- 1) Derive רֶץ, meaning ‘piece, bar’ (here in plural construct) from the root רָצַץ, crush. This goes back at least to Ibn Ezra.
- 2) The sense of ‘piece, bar’ can also be obtained in other ways, for instance assuming צֶרֶף from רָץ, smelt, refine, or assuming בָּצָר by metathesis, the plural construct of בָּצָר, ingot, bar (so LePeau, p212).
- 3) A common alternative reads בָּצָר as a participle derived from רָצָה, be pleased with — thus taking the expression to refer to those who love or lust for silver. Compare RSV (‘those who lust after’) and, for instance, Kidner, p244.
- 4) Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p330, compares with Aramaic בְּרָצִין, ‘pointed headdress’ or ‘turban’ as worn by a high priest. He draws a link with characteristic Hittite costume, but this explanation seems less attractive than the others on offer.

The line thus makes one of two points. Either it describes God trampling on the covetous (RSV), or the enemy itself is grovelling (see previous note) before him with tribute money (AV). I prefer the second of these, but see also the previous note and the structural discussion on p116.

<sup>126</sup> (v31) *scatter*. MT piel perfect may be repointed as an imperative to suit the context. This is supported by LXX, Tg v31, Syriac and Jerome. Otherwise one would translate ‘he rebuked’.

<sup>127</sup> (v32) *envoys*. Although the meaning of the term is not known, three principal options have tended to reemerge during the history of exegesis:

- 1) Gifts (Rashi) or tribute. Compare the root נָחַץ, bronze (RSV translates ‘let bronze be brought...’).
- 2) Hasmonians (Ibn Ezra, Radak); this makes little sense in the context however, and is problematic in chronological terms.
- 3) Rulers (Latin Hebraists); various Latin terms were found to translate the word, including *magni principes*, *magnates*, *optimates*. Luther in turn rendered ‘die Fürsten,’ and the tradition gains support from LXX (πρεσβεις) and Syriac.

Eerdmans, p330-1, cites Egyptian *hsmn*, sodium, as an important export for washing (soap was not traditionally known in Israel and bran was often used). However, it seems reasonable to assume that an official of some kind is intended, and ‘envoys’ seems as good a translation as any.



ממלכות הארץ שירו לאלהים זמרו אדני סלה:

33 Kingdoms of the earth, sing unto God!

Play unto the Lord!

*selah*

לרכב בשמי שמי־קדם הן יחן בקולו קול עז:

34 Behold,<sup>130</sup> he rides on the heavens, the ancient<sup>131</sup> heavens!

Lo, he gives his voice,<sup>132</sup> a voice of strength!<sup>133</sup>

חנו עז לאלהים על ישראל גאותו ועזו בשחקים:

35 Ascribe<sup>134</sup> strength to God!

His glory<sup>135</sup> is upon Israel

And his power in the heavens.<sup>136</sup>

נורא אלהים ממקדשיך

אל ישראל הוא נתן עז ותעצמות לעם

ברוך אלהים:

36 How awesome you are, O God, from your sanctuary!<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> (v32) *Egypt / Cush*. For the significance of these geographical terms see p66-67; Cush is often used in parallel with Egypt and probably picks out Upper Egypt. Barnes, p325, is rather damning on Cush: 'mentioned as a savage, distant and little-known land from which no good thing was expected.'

<sup>129</sup> (v32) *hastens to stretch out*. This is a hiphil third person feminine singular imperfect of רָץ, run. The object 'hands' requires two English verbs, hasten and stretch, to translate the one Hebrew verb. B.D. Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p321, suggests a link with the Aramaic adjective חָרִיץ (from חָרַץ, to level, make right): "in offering a gift man had to put it on his outstretched hand when presenting it to God." This eliminates the problem of the feminine verb but masculine suffix on יָד.

<sup>130</sup> (v34) *behold*. So Dahood, to which Fokkeman, p83, adds supporting evidence. Both cola of v34 contain a repetition (שָׁמַי / שָׁמַי קוֹל), preceded in both cases by a verb followed by the preposition בְּ. This suggests that the lamed usually translated 'to' in 34a does not belong with either the שִׁיר or זָמַר of v33 (זָמַר appears without any preposition in both v5a and v33 in any case). Instead it is an exclamation, equivalent to הֵן in 34b. → הֵן

<sup>131</sup> (v34) *ancient*. Alternative translations are 'heavens of antiquity' or 'primeval heavens'. Compare the similar construction with a repeated noun in Ps 44v2.

<sup>132</sup> (v34) *he gives his voice*. One might also translate 'thunders'.

<sup>133</sup> (v34) *voice of strength*. This somewhat stilted translation enables the repetition and prominence of the root עָז to be more readily observed (note its prominent position at the end of the line).

<sup>134</sup> (v35) *ascribe*. This is a qal imperative of נָחַן (God gives his voice, the people give/ascribe strength to him. An alternative is to assume the root חָנַן, recount, repeat.

Compare Ps 29v1 which uses יָדָב rather than נָחַן, and in which glory as well as strength is ascribed.

<sup>135</sup> (v35) *his glory (is upon Israel)*. Glory or majesty seem to be the most natural translations in the context; excellency was a traditional translation (KJV etc), and pride is a common meaning. Perhaps significantly, גָּאוֹן and relatives are used in Deut 33v26,29; Ex 15v1 (p149+,159+).

<sup>136</sup> (v35) *heavens*. This term is relatively frequent in the Psalter and in Job; its main meanings are 'dust' and 'sky/clouds'; Significant occurrences include Deut 33v26; 2 Sam 22v12 = Ps 18v12. Indeed, the similarity of these verses with Deut 33v26 illustrates that the doxology here in Psalm 68 is probably based largely on that passage (see p159-161).

<sup>137</sup> (v36) *sanctuary*. The plural form may be understood as a plural of extension or amplification, denoting the various parts of the temple, or its dignity. Although the singular is usual, the plural is also found in Lev 21v23; 26v31 (both with a pronominal suffix); Ps 73v17; Jer 51v51; Ez 7v24; 21v7; 28v18; Am 7v9. A singular sense would seem most natural for Lev 21v23; Ps 73v17, and here (the references in Ezekiel may be best translated with a singular also). Jer 51v51 is instructive in referring to 'the sanctuaries of the Lord's house' – as if the temple is made up of several 'sanctuaries' (this differs

**He is the God of Israel, who gives strength and power<sup>138</sup> to his people.**

**Blessed be God!<sup>139</sup>**

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from the standard usage in the Pentateuch). On the other hand, the fact that God has had several different 'dwellings' in Psalm 68 may be taken as a possible explanation of the plural form.

<sup>138</sup> (v36) *power*. This is the only occurrence of חֶעֱצָמָה, but the associated adjective עֲצוּם is common; see, for example, Deut 4v38; Isa 60v22.

<sup>139</sup> (v36) *blessed be God*. This expression also occurs at 66v20.

# PART II

## THE WORLD OF THE TEXT

This section continues the text-centred approach already begun, focussing on the text in its present form. An appreciation of the literary dynamics of a text is important to all other issues (whether source-critical, form-critical, or theological), for the better one understands the text *as a text*, the more ably one can use the evidence it provides in turning to these other questions. The evidence for each of them can come only from the text itself, from the only form in which we now have it. Other matters, such as the unity, dating, and function of the text will build on the foundation with which a text-centred approach may equip us.<sup>1</sup>

I begin with a thorough discussion of the vocabulary and hence themes of the Psalm, and move up through increasingly large units of material: lines and metre, strophes, stanzas, followed by structural analysis of the Psalm as a whole. I next explore Psalm 68's intertextual connections to other texts in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East — a study which is imperative for a text which makes such heavy use of quotation, allusion and echo. It is in this chapter on intertextuality that I start to develop a coherent interpretation of the Psalm as a whole; prior to this I am collecting clues ready for the information to which the intertextual investigation will give rise. My final chapter forms a bridge between this section and the next by looking at the underdeterminacy inherent in the Psalm and the way in which this allows for the possibility of multiple interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to imply that a text-centred approach is an entirely objective method. I accept that it is not; any literary analysis of a text is in some-sense a 'reading' and will betray one's preconceptions to some extent. Nevertheless what I shall be trying to do in this section is to point out objective facts about the text (such as the number of repetitions in it or the presence of ambiguity).



# 1. LEXICAL CHOICE

The vocabulary of Psalm 68 is distinctive in a number of ways which are important for articulating its themes and thematic development and which may also provide clues about its dating and use. This chapter collects and presents evidence ready for application later in the dissertation.

I deal with lexical choice in four sections. First I examine the characterisation of the Psalm, dwelling extensively on the portrayal of God, his enemies and his people. Next I examine the recurrence of words from similar semantic domains across the Psalm, and follow this with a brief look at the wider phenomenon of lexical repetition. Finally I examine the use of archaic or otherwise unusual vocabulary.

## 1.1. Characterisation and Focus

This section investigates the characters who appear in the Psalm. This involves a close study of the many names and epithets of God, and an examination of pronoun shift / change of speaker which is helpful in understanding the dynamics of the Psalm.

### *The Characters Introduced*

The main character in the Psalm is God. The incessant references to him both in third person narrative and in the repeated exclamatory vocatives ('O God!') form a driving rhythm. This aspect, when coupled with the diversity of divine names and epithets on display, constitutes one of the Psalm's most distinctive features. From this pervasive feature alone the Psalm acquires weight — an air of grandeur and importance which might incline one towards the possibility that the Psalm celebrates some great national triumph or important religious festival. The Psalm, like the God it portrays and celebrates, moves inexorably on, propelled by this insistent divinity. The God it celebrates never retires or weakens; he is always there, brooking neither weariness nor failure.

The other characters in the Psalm are all seen in relation to God as the central character. He is omnipresent, while the other characters merely process in front of him and acquire meaning



in relation to him. Israel is pictured in relation to him as his people;<sup>2</sup> the enemies must respond to him in one way or the other, whether in flight or homage; the implied audience ('you') is also encouraged to align itself with him and to praise him as vociferously as they know how.

While the representation of God will be explored more thoroughly in the following subsection, the human characters will be explored now. The usual polarity between righteous and wicked, so common in the Psalter, may be observed here. This comes out particularly clearly in the opening to the Psalm (v2-7<sup>3</sup>): enemies, haters, wicked, and rebellious are set over against righteous, fatherless, widows, lonely, and prisoners. But the polarisation begun here continues throughout the Psalm. We read of the poor in v11, of God's weary inheritance (v10); and, over against them, enemies (v22,24), rebellious (v19), 'he who walks in his offences' (v22), and 'people who delight in war' (v31). A similar set of binary oppositions can be set up between terms such as 'his people' (v36), the tribes (v26-28) and Israel (v34) on the one hand, and kings of hosts (v13), kings (v15,30), envoys from Egypt, Cush (v32), and kingdoms of the earth (v33) on the other.

Such contrasts are particularly powerful when God's relationship to each is brought into view. In various ways the Psalm repeatedly stresses that God can reverse the polarities which human society sets up. God can take those who are at the bottom of the pile, and bring them to the top (v6,7 especially). He can refresh the thirsty, strengthen the weak — and also abase the proud and the powerful. The nation of Israel may seem small when set against the kings of hosts and the kingdoms of the earth — but since Israel is *God's* people it is those powerful kingdoms who should be afraid. In this manner, the very oppositions through which the Psalm insistently organises the world make a major point: the world is divided into two camps, and it is the underdogs who will triumph because they are allied with God.

A number of other 'characters' are also referred to, each falling into one or other of these camps. v26-28 employs various terms to describe those engaged in the processional worship of God, and the identity of מְשֻׁרֵּת (v12), נֹחַ בֵּית (v13) (all positive characters), and the characters of the obscure v31 (all negative) have all been discussed in the notes. It is particularly interesting that the term חֵדָּה, beast, herd, flock (see notes) is used in both halves of the Psalm, once to describe God's people peacefully sated<sup>לֵט</sup> in his inheritance (v11) and

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship between God and his people is emphasised in the use of several nouns suffixed with second person suffixes referring to God: your people (v8), your inheritance (v10), your household (v11).

once to describe a leading enemy king or nation, perhaps in mythological terms, which God is to rebuke (v31). The contrasting usage is perhaps deliberate.

It should also be noted that the implied reader / audience and the implied author are both invoked explicitly by the use of first and second person pronouns within the Psalm. This will be dealt with when use of pronouns and change of speaker is examined.

**Names, Titles and Epithets of God**

The vast majority of Psalms in the Psalter use only one or two terms for God, most commonly אלהים and יהוה; book 3, and, to a lesser extent, book 2 of the Psalter stand out because they contain many Psalms which have 3, 4, or even 5 terms to refer to him. Psalms 68 and 89 take the record, however.<sup>4</sup> The following table is a list of all the names and epithets of God in Psalm 68; I have used a question-mark when the interpretation of a term has been questioned or is one of a set of viable alternatives:<sup>5</sup>

	Term	Epithet / qualifying description
v2	אלהים	.
v3	אלהים	
v4	אלהים	
v5	יה, אלהים	rider through the heavens/wilderness
v6	אלהים	father of the fatherless, judge of widows
v7	אלהים <sup>6</sup>	causer to dwell in houses, bringer out of prisoners
v8	אלהים	
v9	אלהים (2x), סני, זה (? see Notes)	God (אלה) of Israel, Lord of Sinai?
v10	אלהים	
v11	אלהים	
v12	ארני	
v13		
v14		

<sup>3</sup> Here, as elsewhere, I assume a structural division of the text which will not be argued for until a later chapter, p100+.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 89 does not repeat different divine terms in the manner of Psalm 68, but the variety of terms it uses is arresting nevertheless: יהוה (v2,6,7,19,47,52,53), אל (v8,27), צבאות (v9), יה (v9), קדש ישראל (v19), אב (v27), צור (v27), ארני (v50,51).

<sup>5</sup> Compare the discussion of the names of God in Psalm 68 in J.P. Fokkelman, “The Structure of Psalm 68” in A. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past (Oudtestamentische Studiën XXVI*; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p77ff. Out of the sixteen strophes he discerns in the Psalm, fourteen begin with the word God (12 with אלהים, 2 with ארני). He notes that most of the variety is to be found in v17-23.

<sup>6</sup> The epithets are predicates and not appositional: ‘God is the causer to dwell...’.



v15	שרי	
v16	אלהים (?)	
v17	יהוה, אלהים	
v18	סני, אדני, אלהים (? see Notes)	
v19	יה אלהם	
v20	אל, אדני	אל of our salvation
v21	יהוה אדני, אל (2x)	למושעו
v22	אלהים	
v23	אדני	
v24		
v25	אל, אלהים	my God (אל), my king
v26		
v27	יהוה, אלהים	fount/source of Israel (? see Notes)
v28		
v29	אלהים (2x)	your God
v30		
v31		
v32	אלהים	
v33	אדני, אלהים	
v34		rider on the ancient heavens of heavens
v35	אלהים	
v36	אל, אלהים (2x)	אל of Israel, giver of power and strength

This data may be reorganised according to the occurrence of key terms; doubtful occurrences not adopted in the notes are now ignored:

Term	Total	Occurrences
אלהים	25 times	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 9 10 11 16 17 18 19 22 25 27 29 29 32 33 35 36 36
אדני	6 times	12 18 20 21 23 33
אל	5 times	20 21 21 25 36
יהוה	3 times	17 21 27
יה	2 times	5 19
שרי	1 time	15
זה סני	1 time	9

<sup>7</sup> אלהים may be an adjective of emphasis ('great/huge mountain') rather than a divine name. See Notes.

I shall now comment on each of these in turn.

## אלהים

This can be taken as the default term adopted by Psalm 68 when referring to God, as it is for the Elohist Psalter (Psalms 42-83) as a whole. The distinctiveness of Psalm 68 with respect to its use of *elohim*<sup>8</sup> should not be passed over, however. No other Psalm comes remotely close in its use of this term (25 times). Psalm 42 is next with 10 occurrences, while several other Psalms in book 2 have 9 occurrences (50,56,59,69,71) — but all of these are far exceeded by Psalm 68.

The statistics for the term *elohim* can be instructively compared with the tetragram which occurs almost twice as many times in the Psalter overall (695 against 365 occurrences). Even given that fact, only two Psalms approach the frequency of *elohim* in Psalm 68 in their corresponding invocation of God as YHWH: Psalm 118 has 22 occurrences of YHWH, and even the huge 119 has only 24 occurrences, still weighing in below Psalm 68's use of *elohim*. A further 5 Psalms have between 15 and 20 (inclusive) occurrences of YHWH (Psalms 18,33,37,116,135).

These facts emphasise that the use of *elohim* in Psalm 68 is a remarkable phenomenon. Even if allowance is made for the fact that some of the occurrences may have originally stood for other divine terms now editorially replaced (see below), there can be no doubt that the Psalm labours its subject matter. Through the device of repeating divine names and *elohim* in particular a rhythmic base is laid which holds the Psalm together and which centres its readers' attention upon God and his deeds.

It is worthwhile undertaking a closer examination of the distribution of *elohim* within the Psalm. v2-11 are remarkable for their consistency: *elohim* occurs without appositional elements in each verse, and few other terms are used (v5 and 9 are the only exceptions). The term is dominant again at the end of the Psalm (5 occurrences in v32-36, none with appositional elements; note that *elohim* is appropriately the last word of the Psalm). Elsewhere the usage is less consistent, however. Although dominant in the central section, v16-19 (one occurrence in each verse), *elohim* does not occur at all in v12-15, and only 5 times in v20-31 (two of which are in v29). In this way the structural shape of the Psalm

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<sup>8</sup> I transcribe YHWH and *elohim* into English characters for typographic convenience in the following discussion.



outlined later in this study is further emphasised. The beginning, end and central section of the Psalm are demarcated.

LePeau strives to bolster his structural analysis of the Psalm with a point about the usage of divine names which may be conveniently discussed here.<sup>9</sup> His threefold analysis is coupled with the observation that v2-11 begin and end with the term *elohim*, as do his concluding group of verses, v25-36. Though his link between v2-11 and *elohim* is justified (as argued above), it is hard to isolate v25-36 on this basis. Although v25 does contain a vocative *elohim*, so do many other verses of the Psalm, and this particular instance has not been fronted for emphasis as is the case elsewhere. The same point applies to v36. LePeau also points out that אֱלֹהֵי occurs at the beginning and end of his middle section, v12-24, but while אֱלֹהֵי does indeed front v12, its occurrence at v23 is too remote and its occurrences elsewhere in the Psalm too frequent to attribute this to anything other than coincidence.

I want finally to turn attention to several occurrences of *elohim* which deserve particular comment. v9 is interesting on two counts. First, the use of *elohim* in the construct state in the expression 'God of Israel'. This phrase, not used again until the very end of the Psalm (v36, this time with אֱלֹהֵי), occurs here as the concluding part of the description of the theophany of Sinai (v8-9). The Pentateuch presents that experience as the moment when the covenant between God and Israel was made and he became their God. Assuming this background, it is thus highly appropriate that the term *elohim* be further defined as אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל at this point in the Psalm.<sup>10</sup>

The second point of interest in v9 is the clumsy אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל which leads into a discussion of the Elohist Psalter and whether the *elohims* in Psalm 68 are original. The remainder of my discussion of *elohim* now examines some of the issues involved and provides the basis for my decision not to try to predict whether other forms once stood behind the present *elohims*.

The juxtaposition of the absolute and construct states of *elohim* is most uncommon; the only other examples are 2 Chr 34v32; Ps 51v16; 72v18, and since two of these are also from the Elohist Psalter there could be support for regarding the first *elohim* as a replacement for

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<sup>9</sup> J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (unpublished PhD: University of Iowa, 1981), p94.

<sup>10</sup> A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Book of Psalms*, 1 vol. ed. (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*; Cambridge: CUP, 1906; orig. 1902), p382; compare Ex 24v8,10.

YHWH.<sup>11</sup> The fact that occasional occurrences of *elohim* followed by *elohim* with pronominal suffixes are also by and large found in the Elohist Psalter would further support such a claim.<sup>12</sup> The juxtaposition of divine names in apparently clumsy constructions is not impossible, however, and Ps 72v18 furnishes a case in which we have two *elohims* side by side, and a YHWH: *יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*. This is similar to the example from Psalm 68 except for the presence of YHWH, and that might be explained as a reinsertion in a previously *elohised* text in which the first *elohim* had escaped obliteration. There is another example, however: 2 Chron 34v32. It refers to the covenant of God, the God of our fathers — and since the Chronicler did not have an aversion to YHWH (it is used 14 times in the chapter) it can only be supposed that the adjacent *elohims* were deemed unobjectionable. Thus, although the rarity of adjacent *elohims* outside the Elohist Psalter tends to support the proposal that the first stands for an editorially-replaced YHWH or other divine name, the case is not completely watertight.

There is further potential evidence for the common view that the *elohims* in Psalm 68 may in some cases originally have stood for YHWH or some other term. This comes through a consideration of the links between Psalm 68 and parallel passages. Num 10v35 uses YHWH in its record of the *Ladespruch*, but Psalm 68v2 reads *elohim*. Similarly, Jud 5v4 addresses God as YHWH whereas the parallel in Psalm 68v8 employs a vocative *elohim*. These examples and others like them are normally taken as proof of an editorial strategy to replace YHWH with *elohim* in Psalms 42-83.

While the assumption of such a strategy does explain these data, there are other factors which it fails to address adequately: 1) the fact that many occurrences of YHWH and other divine names remain in the Elohist Psalter generally, and in Psalm 68 in particular — the editors must have done a very haphazard job; 2) there are counterexamples to the argument presented in which an Elohist Psalter text contains YHWH while a parallel text uses *elohim*! One also has to ask what the motivation for a strategy of editorial replacement would have been.

The first of these points is the strongest; Psalm 68 quite simply contains too many other divine names and titles to allow the assumption that a strategy of editorial replacement has taken place. To argue that later editors re-inserted or added other divine names after the *elohising* stage helps little, for it only begs the question why they did such an apparently

<sup>11</sup> The construction *יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי* is frequent. There are 209 examples of the consonantal string *יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי* though this of course includes *elohim* with the first person singular suffix, plus the construct state.

<sup>12</sup> An example is Ps 43v4: 'God my God'. 1 Chron 28v20 is an example from outside the Psalter however: *יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי*, so the evidence is not totally from the Psalms.



arbitrary job. Apart from the cases already mentioned in which there is 'independent' evidence to suggest that *elohim* may not be the most natural or original reading, it is now impossible to determine which *elohims* were once YHWHs even if one accepts the theory of editorial replacement. Certainly one would not wish to replace them all, as some commentators have, for then one would be left with a group of Psalms equally out of step with the rest of the Psalter by virtue of the total absence of the term *elohim*! For these reasons no attempt will be made here to reconstruct what the original divine names may have been. In my view much work needs to be done examining the nature and origin of the Elohist Psalter, and a thorough examination of all the relevant facts must be undertaken before one can begin to postulate what the original form of individual Psalms may have been. Such analysis has yet to be carried out and is too large a task to be undertaken here.

Compound expressions with *elohim* such as יה אלהים are discussed under the less common term below.

## אֲדֹנָי

Like *elohim*, אֲדֹנָי is also frequent in Psalm 68 when compared with its appearance elsewhere in the Psalter. It appears 50 times in the Psalter overall, and its six occurrences here are exceeded only in the shorter Psalm 86 which has seven; its distribution clusters around the end of book 1 and in the Elohist Psalter.

I have not been able to determine why אֲדֹנָי should have been used in the particular locations that it has in Psalm 68. The occurrences in v12,18,22 (compare v12 and v22) are set in a military context ('the Lord gives the command', 'the chariots of God...' etc), but this observation does not hold for the occurrences in v20,21,33, even though v21 asserts that אֲדֹנָי has control over the exits from death. There is no evidence that אֲדֹנָי stands in as a replacement for other terms such as the tetragram in Psalm 68, and indeed the expression יהוה אֲדֹנָי of v21 counts against it.<sup>13</sup>

## אֵל

Although it occurs five times here, the usage of אֵל in Psalm 68 is less remarkable from a distributional point of view than the previous two terms. Its use is confined to the latter half of the Psalm (v20,21,25,36). Once again, no clear principles can be determined which

<sup>13</sup> The expression occurs again at Ps 16v2; 109v21; 140v8; 141v8; Hab 3v19.

account for the occurrences of this term and it appears to be used primarily by way of diversity.

## יהוה

The three occurrences of the tetragram are instructive and appear to carry structural and/or thematic significance. The first occurrence of YHWH in v17 appears in what I shall argue to be the climactic central section of the Psalm: YHWH will dwell forever in the hill which he has desired. Indeed, one could argue that this phrase serves well as a summary of the central theme and message of the entire Psalm. YHWH occurs in the second line of the parallelistic pair, a device which heightens focus on the term. This is also true of v27 in which YHWH is paired with *elohim*.

The remaining occurrence is found at v21 in the expression *יהוה אדני*, to whom is ascribed control over death (this may be a reference to Baal's victory over Mot, p184). Both this verse and v17 are thus of central theological significance; v27 draws out the implications for Israel by encouraging her to respond to God in praise (note the use of the term 'fountain' in that verse which may be descriptive of God). Fokkelman's comment is apposite: "The suppression of the proper name yahweh is part of an overall distribution pattern which reserves the specific words for the centre."<sup>14</sup> He speaks of the central section of the poem, v12-24 as he analyses it; but his words are perhaps even more relevant to the theological (rather than structural) 'centre' of the Psalm.

## יה

The two occurrences of *יה* in Psalm 68 are both of interest. *יה אלהים* in v19 does not occur anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible (the two terms co-occur in v5, though not adjacently). v5 emphasises the fact that *יה* is God's name by calling upon the audience of the Psalm to extol him 'by' or 'according to' (*כ*) his name *יה*. This might be understood in two senses: that *יה* is a special term by which God is to be invoked in a specific ceremonial act, or, taking the expression as an idiomatic adjunct to the preceding clause, in the sense 'extol him ... *יה* is his name'. It appears highly significant that the passage should make a particular point about *יה* as a name of God and use it as the first of its many variant terms for him — given the occurrence of the term in Ex 15v2 (its first appearance in the Hebrew Bible). The term only

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<sup>14</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, "Structure", p78.



occurs a total of 46 times, and given the extended allusions to Ex 15 contained in Psalm 68, it seems likely that their mutual fronted use of ה' is not accidental.<sup>15</sup>

## שׁוּ

This term occurs on only one other occasion in the Psalter, 91v1. Elsewhere it occurs in the Pentateuch (where, according to Ex 6v2, it was part of the name of God before the introduction of the term YHWH),<sup>16</sup> and predominantly in the book of Job, along with small numbers of occurrences elsewhere. The derivation of the term is disputed,<sup>17</sup> and any attempt to link the suggestions that have been made to the context of Psalm 68 must proceed cautiously. One marginal possibility is Driver's 'one of the mountain': Psalm 68v15 describes שׁוּ's scattering of kings 'there', and compares it to snow on the dark mountain.<sup>18</sup> But this is clutching at straws. The violent scattering of kings may support the derivation from שׁוּ whose basic meaning is 'deal violently with'. However, there are a sufficient number of other violent acts of God in the Psalm where שׁוּ is not used to limit the value of this observation. Another possible derivation is from שׁוּ, 'pour forth,' which could be linked with God's scattering of the kings and the falling of the snow. However, despite these suggestions one must conclude that it is not possible to determine with any degree of certainty why the term שׁוּ should have been employed at this particular point in the Psalm.

## סני

This term was discussed in the Notes.

## Conclusions

With the exception of the term YHWH, it has unfortunately not been possible in the majority of cases to suggest with any degree of certainty why particular terms have been chosen and employed in deviation from the standard designation elohim. Nor has it been possible to

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<sup>15</sup> A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p380, suggests that Ps 118v4 and Isa 12v2 also deliberately use the term ה' to call to mind the events of the Exodus and to allude to the Song of the Sea. He suggests that a similar situation could obtain here.

<sup>16</sup> See R.W.L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament (Overtures to Biblical Theology)*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> For full discussion see C. Westerman, *Genesis 12-36* (London: SPCK, 1986; orig. *Biblischer Kommentar* 1974-82), on Gen 17v1.

<sup>18</sup> Compare Ps 91v1 which refers to the possibility of dwelling in the secret place of עֲלֵי יוֹן, in the shadow of שׁוּ. A possible mountain reference seems clearer here.

discern behind the manifold appearances of elohim whether any other terms once stood, or what they might have been. Such information appears lost to us.

What may still be said nevertheless — and it is an important conclusion — is that the overall repetition of divine names and the diversity of terms that are used does achieve a powerful literary effect. The Psalm is bound together and given rhythmic drive by virtue of the repetitions. Psalm 68 is a disconcertingly disparate text for a reader to grapple with; but it is held together and given authority and excitement by the insistent references to God and nomenclature associated with him.

There are two possible causes which might lie behind the diversity of divine terminology, both of which give rise to the literary effects just described. One is that it is a deliberate strategy of the Psalm; different divine terms and epithets are purposefully employed to create the grandeur and rhythm just described. The other option is that the diversity has arisen for historical reasons. More careful examination of the compositional history of the Psalm might potentially reveal different strata in the Psalm, each with particular predilections in divine terminology.

### ***Israel and the Tribes***

The characterisation of God's people Israel has already been noted in the preceding paragraphs, but I append here a discussion of the tribal list in v28 since this is a distinctive feature of the Psalm. The tribes mentioned in the list are:

Benjamin      Judah      Zebulun      Naphtali

In asking why these particular tribes should be singled out it is instructive to compare the tribal list of Jud 5.<sup>19</sup> In that text several tribes (Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Manasseh (Machir: Num 32v39,40), Issachar, Naphtali) are praised for their exemplary role in the defeat of Sisera, while several others are berated for their lazy refusal to be involved (Reuben, Dan, Gad (MT 'Gilead'), Asher). There is quite a close parallel between the positive list of Jud 5 and the list in Psalm 68. Dealing with the discrepancies first, Judah is the only tribe mentioned in Psalm 68 which does not occur in Jud 5, but its appearance in Psalm 68 can be explained on other grounds (it is one of the royal tribes, owning a stake in Jerusalem). The Jud 5 list has Ephraim, Manasseh and Issachar extra to the Psalm's list.

The tribes common to both lists are Benjamin, Zebulun and Naphtali. We may not be too surprised at Benjamin's appearance in either text: the son of Jacob through Rachel, and, in



the time of the Monarchy, with strong royal associations. Psalm 68 also appears to single out Benjamin because of its status as small and weak (Benjamin is the youngest son); this allows the Psalm to show God's ability to subvert the norms of the world through his power. The defender of the widows and the settler of the lonely in families shows that he is such by making the smallest tribe the leader of the tribal procession. Zebulun and Naphtali provide the most striking parallel between the two texts. They are singled out in both Judges 4v6,10 as providing the core of the army who ascended mount Tabor, and in the poetic account of 5v14 (Zebulun), 18 (Zebulun and Naphtali). v18 is the strongest tribute or expression of praise handed out to any of the tribes: Zebulun and Naphtali 'jeoparded their lives unto the death (cf v2,9) in the high places of the field.' This bravery as they fought along with the stars (v20) and God himself (much as in Psalm 68), appears to be echoed in Psalm 68 as Benjamin, Zebulun and Naphtali are granted prominence in the tribal procession.

The links between the two texts are suggestive, but ultimately not close enough to provide the primary justification for their occurrence in Psalm 68. A better explanation comes by noting that Zebulun and Naphtali are northern tribes while Benjamin and Judah are southern royal tribes which share the city of Jerusalem as part of their territory (Josh 15v8,63; Dt 33v12). The northern and southern tribes constitute a merism which probably represents the whole of Israel from the northernmost tip right down to the royal tribes of Judah and Benjamin. All are involved, united in procession to God's temple, joyful in their celebrations.

Other explanations have been proffered by those searching for particular historical scenarios. For those dating the Psalm in the time of Hezekiah it may be pointed out that Zebulun and Naphtali are both prominent tribes in the celebration of Hezekiah's passover. In postulating an exilic date, Kirkpatrick suggests that Zebulun and Naphtali had suffered most from the Assyrian invasion, but are now restored to honour (cf Isa 9v1). The restoration of Israel as well as Judah is foretold in passages like Am 9v11ff; Hos 3v5ff; Jer 3v17,18.Ezr 8v35; Ps 122v4.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Eerdmans suggests that the great trade route between Assyria and Egypt which ran through Zebulun and Naphtali (Gen 49v13) was under attack and that those two tribes had called in the help of the southern kingly tribes of Judah and Benjamin to protect the route. The fact that the southern tribes were invoked (rather than Samaria) for him indicates a dating during the Monarchy but before its division.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately each of these explanations is unconvincing in comparison to the simpler explanation of the meristic

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<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed examination of the close parallels between Jud 5 and Psalm 68, see p144-149.

<sup>20</sup> A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p392.

<sup>21</sup> B.D. Eerdmans, *The Hebrew Book of Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 1947), p332.

inclusion of all the tribes by the reference to those in the north and those in the south. By this use all Israel is claimed to be united in praise of God.

### ***Pronouns and Change of Speaker***

I want now to chart the change of grammatical subjects and persons within the Psalm: when, for instance, is God spoken of in the third person and when in the second — and are there any patterns in the distributions which emerge? I begin with a verse by verse listing divided into three categories (grammatical person is indicated in brackets; alternatives are presented in square brackets). I am interested here only in grammatical subjects, not objects, although notes about non-subject pronominal suffixes have sometimes been included in the right hand column.

	God	-ve	+ve	other	alternatives
2	God (3)	enemies (3)			
3	God (2)	wicked (3)			
4			righteous (3)		
5			audience (2pl imper)		
6	God (3)				
7	God (3)	rebellious (3)			
8	God (2 voc)				
9				earth, heaven (3)	
10	God (2 voc)				
11	God (2 voc)		God's household/beast (3)		
12	God (3)			tidings bearers (3)	
13		kings (3)	beauty of house (3)		
14			you (2pl)	wings of dove (3) [audience? (2pl) /	
				ננוח בית (2)]	
15	God (3)				
16				mount Bashan (3)	
17	God (3)			peaked mountains (2 voc)	
18	God / chariots (3)				
19	God? (2) God? (3)				[some other 2m.sg.; the rebellious (3) God (2 voc)]
20	God (3)		audience (1pl)		
21	God (3)		audience (1pl)		
22	God (3)				



23	God (3) + direct speech (1)		
24		audience (2sg)    dog's tongue (3)	[nb <i>your</i> dog]
25	God (2 voc)    nations? (3)		
	God's (2) processions (3)		[nb <i>my</i> God, <i>my</i> king]
26		princes, musicians (2pl voc)	
27		ditto (2pl)	[audience? (2pl)]
28		Benjamin etc (3)	
29	G (3 2 voc)		[nb <i>your</i> God, <i>your</i> strength; for <i>us</i> ]
30		kings (3)	[nb from <i>your</i> (God's) temple]
31	God (2 imper)    they (beast, kings, peoples) (3)		
32		→    envoys, Cush (3)	
33		→    kingdoms of earth (2 voc)	
34	God (3)		
35	God's excellency/power (3)	audience? (2pl imper)	[kingdoms? cf v33]
36	God (2 voc 3)		

The following observations may be drawn from this:

- The Psalm is written predominantly in the third person. God is the central subject and is referred to in almost all the other verses in which he is not already the subject of a sentence. The righteous and/or his people are another dominant subject, along with the wicked and/or the nations. In the second half of the Psalm this latter group begins to change camps to ally themselves with God. The wicked/nations group are as frequently objects as subjects, acted upon by God.
- On a number of occasions God is addressed in the second person. This usage does not appear to be systematised, and is evenly spread across the Psalm. In many of these instances he is addressed in the vocative. This has the effect of making the Psalm more immediate, of actualising him more concretely. This is not merely an account of what some god does or did — it is about a God the Psalmist and his community knows and with whom they have a relationship, for they are able to address him as 'you'. Changes of grammatical person of this type are relatively frequent in the Hebrew Bible and sometimes may be indicative of historical seams just as they may, on other occasions, reflect literary strategy (compare the following point). The switches of subject do give an air of spontaneity to the Psalm and may be thought most naturally to reflect a liturgical context.

- The rapid shifts in subject and pronominal suffixes so frequent in the Psalm (eg v29/30) are evidence of a paratactic style which is characteristic of a certain corpus of Hebrew poetry, most particularly Jud 5.
- The Psalm addresses the wicked/the nations only on one occasion in the second person, v33, and it should be noted that this is the part of the Psalm in which the nations have now begun to come over to God's side. The nations are brought closer into the Psalm's sphere of interest in this part of the Psalm, and are consequently appealed to directly in imperative address to praise God. Elsewhere they are kept at a distance in the third person.
- All texts imply an audience at some level; Psalm 68 takes the step of addressing that audience explicitly. In v5 it is exhorted to sing to God, and perhaps similarly in v35. It is also possible that the audience is: a) rebuked in v14 for previously being dilatory; b) referred to in v24 as benefitting from God's military accomplishments; c) encouraged to join the triumphal procession in v27. There are other possible references to the audience in v29 ('your God, your strength'). This implied audience is most naturally understood as the faithful worshipping community which the Psalm is seeking to rouse and inspire.
- Perhaps even more interesting are the first person references. The Psalmist includes his audience in a first person plural reference to God's deliverances for *us* in v20,21. This usage is so striking that its placement at the beginning of the second half of the poem can hardly be accidental. This part of the poem will expound the significance of all God's deeds in the first half of the Psalm and his great ascent at the centre both for his people, for his enemies and for the nations, and for the audience. This is brought out by this inclusive reference. The first person singular in v25 is more odd, but serves to identify the voice of the Psalm as a speaker who is aligned with God. In doing so it encourages the audience to align themselves in a similar way.

Fokkelman<sup>22</sup> also notes the changes of speaker which are characteristic of the Psalm and seeks to use them to identify its literary structure. He is particularly interested in the change from second to third person. As the chart above indicates, however, it is not possible to divide the Psalm neatly on this basis, and Fokkelman's analysis is thus unconvincing in this respect.

This analysis completes my examination of characterisation within the Psalm.

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<sup>22</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, "Structure", p74+.



## 1.2. Semantic Domains

In this chapter I attempt to identify the principle themes of Psalm 68 by a detailed examination of vocabulary. I look at different semantic domains within the Psalm, discovering that despite its apparent disconnectedness, there are vital lexical strands running through it which bind it together and unify it. This section includes an investigation of the geography of the Psalm and a treatment of its rare and unusual vocabulary.

### ***The Shape of Psalm 68: Thematic Analysis***

At the outset of this chapter I want to reveal my hand, so to speak, by singling out what I judge to be the most significant recurrent theme of the Psalm, one which involves constant repetition: the related but contrasting ideas of *movement* and *dwelling* (the latter idea could also be captured by the use of the term *presence*). These themes give thematic unity; they are a valuable way of encapsulating the text, of capturing what the Psalm is about in a brief compass. Second only to the repeated emphasis on God as the main character of the Psalm (see the previous chapter), the twin themes of movement and dwelling provide the most pervasive example of repetition in Psalm 68 and provide the thematic key to unlock it. Interpreters of the Psalm must be able to give an account of why these themes should be so dominant in the text they seek to explain.

### **Motifs of the Dwelling and Presence of God**

The theme of God's presence among his people realised through his dwelling in their midst is highlighted in a number of ways in Psalm 68. References to his presence are made through repetition of the phrase 'before God' at the beginning of the Psalm, but there are also several verbs of dwelling, and references to various abodes of God throughout.

#### **Before God**

The root פנה is dominant at the beginning of the Psalm in much the way that the form לו is dominant at the end. It occurs more here than in any other Psalm, and all in the space of eight verses. Here are the occurrences:

- v2      Those that hate him flee before him (מפניו)
- v3      As wax melts before the fire (מפני)  
         The wicked perish before God (מפני)

- v4 Exult before God (לפני)
- v5 And rejoice before him (לפניו)
- v8 When he went out before your people (לפני)
- v9 The heavens gushed before God (מפני)
- Before God, the God of Israel (מפני)

Most of these occurrences of פנה describe the presence of God and the consequent reaction of some part of his creation. The wicked flee or perish (v2, 3b), the heavens gush (v9a,b). Amidst all this, the righteous bask and rejoice (v4,5). The remaining two occurrences make a similar point: v3a describes wax melting at the presence of fire as an analogy of the wicked in the presence of God; v8 emphasises the proximity of God and his people in that he went out before them. This reversal of the Psalm's prevailing usage of פנה to describe God in relation to Israel rather than other things in relation to God (as is universally the case in the other occurrences above) only serves to heighten God's magnanimity in so graciously associating himself with his people and enabling himself to be defined in relation to them. This subtle reversal in v8 thus nicely emphasises the point the verse is making: how remarkable it is that such a great God should go forth before his people!

The point is that God is *there* to defend and bless his people and to terrorise and scatter his enemies. He is not remote; he is present amongst his people and against his enemies. The fact that this repetition is initiated with and continues beyond the quotation of the Ark Saying from Num 10v35 is perhaps not without significance. The active presence of God was symbolised by that very cultic object which, according to the Pentateuchal narratives, travelled with Israel through the wilderness towards the promised land, with enemies scattering as it went. Thinking in these intertextual terms it is interesting to note the cultic connotations of the expression 'before the Lord' in its characteristic use by the Priestly writer.<sup>23</sup> The phrase evoked the special relationship of God and Israel and her consequent cultic obligations; a God as near as this had to be approached with deliberation and in a highly specified manner to ensure both that he remained with them, and that they remained safe. Psalm 68 emphasises the point that God's presence devours his enemies, but that the righteous (who know better how to approach him) may rejoice and exult before him.

### Verbs of Dwelling

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<sup>23</sup> The classic study is B. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).



Several verbs related to the semantic domain of *dwelling* and *remaining* are used in Psalm 68. The first group occurs with God as subject, but, significantly, only in the central section, v16-19.<sup>24</sup> Here we read of ‘the mountain which God desires to  *dwell* in (יֵשֵׁב), and that ‘YHWH will  *dwell* (יֵשֵׁב) there for ever’ (v17). This verse is particularly significant; not only is it the most direct statement of this motif found in the Psalm, it also contains the first occurrence of YHWH. Some have argued for the use of שָׁבַח rather than יֵשֵׁב in v17a (see Notes) implying God’s completion of a major objective by ascending this mountain and leading captivity captive — having successfully completed this, he may now sit down to rest (just as on the seventh day). Retaining יֵשֵׁב is perfectly acceptable, however, and the statement that God wants to dwell or be seated on the mountain is a crucial one. The fact that he will dwell here *forever* further emphasises the centrality of what is achieved in this stanza to his overall purpose. Such is his desire for this mountain that he will never get bored and have to move on; he will be staying here perpetually.

v19 continues the theme. I prefer the interpretation of the last clause which takes יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ as the subject of  *dwell* (יֵשֵׁב; see Notes), implying that God’s ascent and victory over captivity has enabled him to take up residence in his desired mountain.

Other occurrences of such roots of dwelling take God’s people or the disadvantaged as subject. God is the one who causes widows to dwell (יֵשֵׁב) in houses (v7); because of his kindness his household ‘dwells (יֵשֵׁב) there’. Additionally, v13-14 speak of the נִרְחָקִים and those ‘who remain (שָׁבַח) between the saddlebags / panniers / hearthstones’ (see Notes). They are encouraged (or possibly reprimanded) to take a part in the division of spoils which God has won in battle for his people. שָׁבַח is also used to describe the fate of the rebellious: they will dwell in a parched land (v7). On this level the Psalm can be said to be all about dwelling: about how God dwells amongst his people and has come to dwell in a particular mountain where he will remain forever, about how he provides housing for his people and even for his enemies (though not the kind of residence they might have liked!).<sup>25</sup>

## Abodes of God

Psalm 68 also refers to various abodes or dwelling-places of God:<sup>26</sup>

father of the fatherless ... is God in *his holy habitation*                      v6

<sup>24</sup> My structural analysis is found on p100-129.

<sup>25</sup> Other lexical items associated with dwelling include *house* in v7 and 13.

<sup>26</sup> The various decisions of translation reflected in this list are argued for in the Notes.

a <i>mountain of God</i> is Mount Bashan	v16
this is <i>the mountain God has chosen</i> to rest in	v17
God came from Sinai <i>to the sanctuary</i>	v18
the processions of my God my King <i>to the sanctuary</i>	v25
from <i>your temple at Jerusalem</i> kings will bring gifts	v30
how awesome you are <i>in your sanctuary</i>	v36

The Psalm also speaks of the *chariots* of God, and informs us that ‘the Lord is among them’ (his *presence* emphasised once again). Although the term ‘chariot’ relates more obviously to the motif of God’s *movement*, a vehicle is a place of location and presence whilst one is travelling.

## Journeying Motifs

The idea of God’s *movement* (in some senses an opposite of *dwelling*) is another which keeps appearing throughout the Psalm. This is seen predominantly in the use of verbs of motion.

## Verbs of Motion

Before focussing specifically on God, it is worth merely cataloguing some of the verbs of motion in the Psalm regardless of subject. הֵלֵךְ is found in v22 and 25, two verses which provide quite a contrast with each other. One refers to the person who *walks* in his offences, the other to the *goings* or processions of God. The root יָצָא is found in v7, 8 and 21 (God not only goes forth himself; he is also the one who causes others to go forth from prison and the one to whom belong the ‘exits’ from death), and the verb בָּרָא is found in v18. Various other roots connected with motion are also used, in relation to both God and man: קָם, עָלָה, רָכַב, יָשַׁב, יָבֹל, אָחַז, רָדַם, קָדַם, צָעַד. These occur in relation to God in the following configurations:

קָם	God <i>arises</i>	v2
רָכַב	the <i>rider</i> through the wilderness	v5
	the <i>chariots</i> of God	v18
	the <i>rider</i> on the heavens	v34
יָצָא	when you <i>went forth</i>	v8
צָעַד	when you <i>marched</i>	v8
עָלָה	you <i>ascended</i> on high	v19
יָבֹל	I (God) will <i>bring back</i>	v23



Equally noticeable are the synonyms of fleeing and scattering. The form  $\text{ןִןִןִןִןִ}$  occurs twice in v13;  $\text{פִּוֵּץ}$  and  $\text{נֹרֵם}$  are found in v2;  $\text{פָּרֵשׁ}$  occurs in v15 (with God as subject, scattering his enemies), and  $\text{בָּזַר}$  in v31 (also with God as subject). These are all used to describe the movement of others *away from God*. God moves through the wilderness towards his new home, and his enemies take flight. To be contrasted with these is the processional language and the description of the nations bringing tribute to God.

### Other Terms Implying Movement

The many geographical and locational terms of the Psalm are also to be noted, for it is in relation to them that God's movement is expressed. He is the one who rides across desert and heaven, the one who brings out and brings back. He is the one who went forth before his people, marching (from Sinai?) through wilderness, Jeshimon and on towards the mountain in which he desired to rest. God is associated both with Sinai (v18, as in Judges 5), and with Jerusalem (v30). I consider the geographical terms in the following subsection.

References to God's chariots coupled with the ark saying and the traditions which envisaged it as a form of chariot are also important to the development of the theme.

The implication of all this data is that one of the main themes of Psalm 68 is the movement of God towards his sanctuary, his goings forth on behalf of his people, his presence among them and against his enemies, and his ascension to and dwelling in the mountain he has desired. The result of all this is the procession of men and women in his honour, whether in cultic act or in the bringing of tribute.

### Geography

The Psalm is notable for the variety of geographical locations it encompasses. I shall look at these in turn and then make some comments about their significance as a group.

### Place Names in Psalm 68

#### Arabot

This term is used in a variety of ways within the Hebrew Bible, though always with the underlying idea of 'plain, desert' rather than 'heaven'. In the Notes I argue that 'desert' or an

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<sup>27</sup> Note also the root  $\text{ןִןִןִןִןִ}$  in v32.

equivalent is the correct translation, but that a sly nod at Baal's epithet of *rkbb 'rpt* is intended.<sup>28</sup>

Some sample texts are Josh 4v13 in which ערבה refers to the region around Jericho, in Num 22v1 to Moab, and in Isa 40v3 to the country between Babylon and Palestine. The majority of occurrences, like the first two just itemised, relate to Israel's experiences in the wilderness and during the conquest.<sup>29</sup> This is a highly significant point for the interpretation of the Psalm, and neutralises Eerdmans' attempt to argue that the term is never used of the Exodus.<sup>30</sup> ערבה is a term which, by virtue of its Hebrew Bible usage, is linked to the wilderness and conquest traditions when Israel came from the south to conquer the land.

### Jeshimon

The term Jeshimon occurs thirteen times in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>31</sup> and in almost half of these it appears in parallel with מרבר. Sometimes it appears to be a proper name, and on other occasions a general term meaning 'desert', used to refer to the wilderness of Judaea. From the Numbers references to Balaam it is possible that a place north-east of the Dead Sea is intended, and the term may be used to refer to two different locations.<sup>32</sup> In the present passage it is not necessary to pinpoint a precise location, since it is more likely that the term is used because of its general associations with Israel's foundational traditions of wilderness and conquest.

### Zalmon

The reference to Zalmon in Psalm 68 is more difficult, and it is very probable that we have in this verse an allusion to a particular historical episode or tradition that is now lost to us. Conjecturing from the information available, two possibilities emerge.

The first is a reference to the mountain near Shechem referred to in Judges 9v48 from which Abimelech and his men cut down trees to use as battering-rams. Why this mountain should

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<sup>28</sup> See p182 and Notes.

<sup>29</sup> The term occurs around sixty times. Around half of these are in Num, Deut and Josh. Intriguingly, KJV translates as 'champaign' in Deut 11v30!

<sup>30</sup> B.D. Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p326.

<sup>31</sup> Num 21v20; 23v28; Deut 32v10; 1 Sam 23v19,24; 26v1,3; Ps 78v40; 106v14; 107v4; Isa 43v19,20 and here. Compare Ps 55v16.

<sup>32</sup> J. Simon, *Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* (1959), p22f.



figure in Psalm 68 would be a complete mystery, however; it is very small, and it is doubtful if it ever received the snow for which Zalmon in Psalm 68 is evidently famed.<sup>33</sup>

The second possibility is to translate the term as 'Dark One' or 'Black Mountain', deriving it from the root צלם, black. In this case the most probable referent would be one of the peaks of Bashan. Being about 6000 feet high, these do receive snow, and the reference would mesh well with the following passage (v16-17) in which Bashan is explicitly mentioned. Jebel Druze on the border of Bashan has been singled out as the most likely candidate, an option followed by a number of scholars.<sup>34</sup> It seems the better option given the present state of knowledge — but it may be wiser to recognise that the nature of this reference cannot now be identified with any certainty.

### Bashan

Bashan is generally the name of a region rather than a specific mountain in the biblical texts (the present passage being the only potential exception). Nevertheless, it is a region which is mountainous and it does not require a great leap of imagination to conceive that one of its peaks might be referred to as 'mount Bashan', or indeed, that the phrases הָרִים גְּבֻנִים are fitting descriptions of a region with multiple peaks, the tallest mountains in the region.

In particular, it is probable that mount Hermon would be the peak singled out as the 'mount Bashan' in this text. It forms the northern boundary of Bashan (Deut 3v8), was the largest mountain in the area at 9000 feet, and was revered from ancient times as a sacred locality (compare Ps 42/43).<sup>35</sup> Hermon was an important cultic site in Canaanite religion, closely associated with Canaanite gods — a fact which may be of particular significance to Psalm 68 (p183).

If Hermon is the mountain intended in v16,17, why is the term Bashan used instead? First, the possibility must be borne in mind that 'mount Bashan' was a quite standard way of referring to Hermon, though otherwise unknown to us. More important than this is the fact that most readers would guess that Hermon was meant by the circumlocution (the history of

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<sup>33</sup> T.H. Robinson in W.O.E Oesterley, *The Psalms*, vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1939), p320, opts for this mountain.

<sup>34</sup> This term is variously spelt, and is referred to elsewhere as the Hauran and the Asalmanos of Ptolemaeus. See B.D. Eerdmans, *Psalms*, p328-9; J.H. Eaton, *Psalms (Torch Bible Commentaries)*; London: SCM, 1967), p172; W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems—Ps LXVIII" *HUCA* 23.1 (1950), p23; D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (Lutterworth, 1957), p194,222.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 217.39 with respect to Christian times. M. Bittenwieser, *The Psalms: Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p37, claims that Hermon means 'sacred region'.

exegesis bears witness to this), and that the term Bashan was used because of particular connotations which it carried within the biblical texts and more widely. Bashan was famed for its cattle, and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is a symbol of pride and wealth. These are the very attributes which God spurns in his choice of Zion. Zion is picked as an anti-mountain, as it were — for the very fact that it is small. God, after all, is the one who defends the widow and the fatherless, the one who exalts the low and abases the proud. An important theological point is thus made in this passage. Although Bashan/Hermon might be thought to be more splendid and grand than the mountains of Israel, God has rejected them and chosen Zion.

It is also worth noting that paradigmatic battles of the conquest were fought against the great rulers of the Bashan area. Og king of Bashan and his bedstead are famed not only in the Pentateuch, but in the Psalter as well. The Israelites' victory against him and against Sihon king of the Amorites are representative battles of the conquest as the biblical history presents it.

## Sinai

In the Notes I have argued that the term Sinai at v8 is part of a divine title, but that at v18 the text should be re-divided to read 'the Lord came from Sinai' (see Notes). In any case, whatever reading is preferred for both passages, it is clear that the Psalm is drawing the reader's attention to the location of Mount Sinai, and the vital traditions which are associated with it.

The occurrences of the term Sinai are largely confined to Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers (approximately thirty times). Its other occurrences are in ancient poetry (Deut 33v2; Jud 5v5; twice here in Psalm 68)<sup>36</sup> and Neh 9v13 only. The Deuteronomist's preferred term is Horeb, and outside Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history<sup>37</sup> this occurs only at Ps 106v19; Mal 4v4 and three times in Exodus.<sup>38</sup>

The location of the giving of the law is thus referred to only infrequently in Hebrew Bible texts outside the Pentateuch. This is a surprising phenomenon, and one which, given the apparent antiquity of the poetic texts in which the term Sinai is used, renders Psalm 68's linking of Sinai and Jerusalem all the more significant. Because of its concern for Sinai *and* Jerusalem (so significant in prophetic and historical texts from Samuel on), Psalm 68 is a

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<sup>36</sup> For parallels between these texts, see p144+, 159+.

<sup>37</sup> Deut 1v2,6,19; 4v10,15; 5v2; 9v8; 18v16; 29v1; 1 Kin 8v9 (= 2 Chr 5v10); 19v8.



central text for the sacred geography of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>39</sup> While the law is always a given in later texts dealing with Zion and Jerusalem, fundamental to and defining of Israel's relationship with God, Sinai itself as a sacred site is not (witness the almost total absence of any references to it). Psalm 68 links the old (Sinai) with the new (Jerusalem), and explains that the significance of the one has been transferred to the other.<sup>40</sup>

Once again, the very use of the term Sinai and its distribution elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible helps focus the interpretative lens on wilderness traditions as Psalm 68 is read.

### **Jerusalem / Zion**

The occurrence of Jerusalem in v30 has been dismissed as a late addition, although I do not think there is any good reason for doing so and I have retained the reference here. Jerusalem is referred to as the location of God's temple to which the nations come to give honour and gifts to God.

Zion does not occur at all, although once Psalm 68 is read in a biblical context it is clear that v16-19 refers to God's choice of that location for his seat among men. Reading Psalm 68 as part of the biblical traditions, a reference to Zion is implicit in these verses. Despite the logic of such an interpretation, however, the absence of an explicit reference to Zion is surprising,<sup>41</sup> given that approximately one fifth of the Psalms in the Psalter do refer to it. Jerusalem, by contrast, is mentioned in only ten other Psalms.<sup>42</sup>

### **Tabor**

Some scholars have suggested that parts of Psalm 68 were originally used in the worship of a sanctuary at Tabor, the site of Deborah and Barak's victory over Sisera. However, despite the connections between Judges 5 and Psalm 68, there is no mention of Tabor in the Psalm, nor any substantial reason to assume that the Psalm relates to such a cultic site. It is better to use the more certain clues the text presents in order to postulate the original setting of the Psalm.

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<sup>38</sup> Ex 3v1; 17v6; 33v6.

<sup>39</sup> The New Testament did not miss out on the significance of the two sites. There are two memorable passages which link them: Hebrews 12v18-29 and Galatians 4v22-31.

<sup>40</sup> Despite the clear way in which Psalm 68 charts this movement and may equate the two locations, it is interesting that many Jewish readings of Psalm 68 have related it to the giving of the law at Sinai. For such readings the mount of God in v16-19 is Sinai, not Zion (p253).

<sup>41</sup> On the interpretative significance of this point see p197.

<sup>42</sup> Ps 51v20; 68v30; 79v1,3; 102v22; 116v19; 122v2,3,6; 125v2; 128v5; 135v21; 137v5,6,7; 147v2,12.

## Egypt / Cush / Pathros

Egypt and Cush occur in parallel in v32, and some rework MTs מִחֶרֶץ into a reference to Pathros in v31, although I regard this as an error (see Notes). Egypt and Cush occur together at Isa 11v11; 20v3-5; 43v3; 45v14; Ez 29v10; 30v4,5,9; Nah 3v9. Isa 20v3-4 and Eze 30v4 are particularly clear in their implication that the two terms are synonyms for Egypt,<sup>43</sup> Cush perhaps referring to upper (southern) Egypt, and Egypt to lower (northern) Egypt. An alternative is to regard Cush as symbolic or representative of distant (perhaps barbaric) nations, and Egypt to represent a powerful/cultured nation.

Cushites are listed amongst David's servants in 2 Sam 18v21, and if Psalm 68 dates from the time of the early Monarchy then a reference to Cush hastening to come to God would be appropriate. The two nations were also important in the time of Hezekiah: 2 Chron 32v23; Is 18v7; 19v23-25; 11v16; Ps 87v4.

The most important aspect of the mention of Egypt in this verse is the role of Egypt in biblical history. According to the biblical account, Israel came out from Egypt and were born there as a nation; now Egypt herself comes to recognise the hand of YHWH and to submit herself to him. Egypt now sends messengers, representatives or princes, just as God once sent Moses to ask for Israel's release.

## Significance of Geographical Terms

I now attempt to analyse the implications of this array of locations. We may begin with Jerusalem, perhaps not mentioned until v30 as a deliberate strategy to provoke suspense. The terms Arabot (v5), Jeshimon (v8) and Sinai (v18, and as a title of God in v9) all refer to locations yet further south, and the distribution of their occurrences elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible provides good support for linking this three-fold cluster to the traditions of Israel's journey through the wilderness.<sup>44</sup>

At least one northern location is referred to: Bashan (v16,23), and possibly the difficult Zalmon (v15). Yet God's final choice of abode is ultimately in neither of these extremities of north and south, but instead Zion/Jerusalem, which lies somewhere between the two. The reference to Bashan may be only a foil to highlight what God has done in choosing Jerusalem rather than the fertile and famous northern location he might have been expected to choose.

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<sup>43</sup> Compare R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985), p512.

<sup>44</sup> This point is clinched by the quotation of the Ark Saying as the opening of the Psalm.



God comes from the south, yes, but the only reason he might go up as far as Bashan is to 'bring back' from there (v23) — back to Jerusalem where his real interest lies.

To complete the geography, two further place names are mentioned, Egypt and Cush (v32). These places are not to be set on a north-south axis, but rather serve as an illustration of the claimed or hoped-for universality of God's business upon earth. By mentioning these far-off places, the Psalm pushes out its boundaries. God is not merely concerned with Jerusalem and the places to the north and south of it; his dealings with Israel are to open out to affect the whole world. Egypt and Cush stand as representatives of that world, the one perhaps standing for power and the other for distance. It is significant that Israel's story as a nation begins with Exodus from slavery in Egypt; by the time the concluding parts of Psalm 68 have been reached, it is the Egyptians who are coming to pay homage in Israel! *Heilsgeschichte* has come full circle, as one writer has put it.<sup>45</sup> Egypt and Cush, as far-off places, are to be contrasted with the nearness of God's own people Israel, just as north was set against south earlier in the Psalm. Israel is near, and they are far — but ultimately *all* must come to Jerusalem to worship God, and in this the Psalm unites the whole world in its vision.

### Other Terms of Topography and Location

Along with these place-names there are another group of topographical terms, which, once itemised, form quite a considerable list. Many of these can be grouped into pairs which form opposites and may also have meristic effect. The heavens and the earth of v9 is the clearest example, along with the similar contrast between the heavens of heavens (v34) and the depths of the sea (v23).<sup>46</sup> We have the banality of life by the fireside or in the sheepfolds (see Notes) set against the prestige of God's chosen mountain and the many-peaked mountains which vie with it. Then there is the ambiguous term Arabot already alluded to, which, while certainly carrying its most natural sense of 'wilderness' here, nevertheless has been understood to have the secondary meaning 'heavens' since early times (see Notes). A final locational term is מָרוֹם, 'on high' in v19.

One gains the impression of being taken by the Psalm on a guided tour of the created world: from the wilderness up to the highest peaked mountains and even beyond to a place 'on high' which is symbolically even higher than they, for God has chosen it. We are taken from the

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<sup>45</sup> The phrase is, I think, Ortlund's.

<sup>46</sup> Perhaps 'depths of the sea' should be contrasted rather with the reference to Bashan which occurs in the same verse. Bashan has been singled out for its *mountains* earlier in the Psalm (v16), so its mountain height provides a good contrast with the depths of the sea. See Notes.

depths of the sea right up into heaven, and, indeed, the very heaven of heavens! What is the purpose and effect of this geographical whistle-stop tour?

In answer, the multitude of geographic locations and place-names imbue the Psalm with an air of significance. This is no trivial text the reader is encountering, so the repetitions seem to assert, but one which affects everyone everywhere. Though Zion may be a small hill in a tiny part of the world — and there may be a touch of self-consciousness about this which the Psalm seeks to rebut, repelling it even as it is felt — this neither makes God small nor his activities insignificant. After all, God did not come from Zion originally (he came from the south, for he was the one who brought Israel from Egypt through the wilderness), and he was perfectly capable of choosing a more ‘prestigious’ abode (he knew of the proud and fertile regions of the north, but spurned them in capricious favour of Zion). In fact, his dominion is universal, for he is the one who rides through the heavens and can fathom the depths of the seas, with all that this implies in terms of the mythology of the period. There is nowhere which is out-of-bounds for God and for his purpose, nowhere to which his sphere of influence does not extend, whether it be from the homely fireplace to the heavens of antiquity. As the Psalm envisions it, God is Lord of all, and one day all the peoples of the earth — even the mighty nation of Egypt and the distant land of Cush — will be united in submission and praise to him.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Merism and Antithesis***

The brief look at the topography of the Psalm just undertaken serves to draw attention to a wider phenomenon. It was noted that the Psalm steps through the antitheses of high and low, north and south, near and far — and that these may be meristic. All the created world, high and low, north and south, is caught up in God’s activities; all the nations, near and far, Israel and Egypt, Israel and Cush, will be involved and will be forced to place themselves in relation to the world’s new centre in Jerusalem.

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<sup>47</sup> One could also understand the emphasis on God’s universal control as highlighting the wonder that should choose Mount Zion. Could not such a great God have chosen a bigger mountain? — it is a wonder and privilege for Israel that he should condescend to choose Zion! However, the vigorous and aggressive nature of the Psalm is such that the capricious nature of God’s behaviour rather than his condescension is probably being emphasised. The Psalm strives to inculcate pride rather than humble wonder that God should have chosen Zion. The middle and latter portions of the Psalm do not really address the issue of *why* God should have chosen Jerusalem or Israel or seek to make an awed devotional response to the claim; instead they simply capitalise on the fact that he has, proudly praising him and rejoicing in the submission of other nations.



These are not the only examples. The Psalm refers to four of the tribes of Israel, and these too form a meristic pattern. Zebulun and Naphtali are northern tribes while Benjamin and Judah are southern and have a close connection with Jerusalem. The whole of Israel is united in procession to God's temple.

The God who gives the battle cry and marches like a warrior (v8,12) is the same God who lovingly cares for his people (v6-7,10-11). These are the extremes of his ways, but the implication may be that he is 'everything else in between' to his people. The heavens and earth respond to him in fear and storm (v9), yet the same God can gently coax them to do his bidding as he provides his weary people with bountiful rain (v10). He has supreme control.

Coupled with these are the antitheses already noted when the thematic and structural shape of the Psalm was examined. God travels ceaselessly in the first half of the Psalm, yet he is always there among his people, coming to dwell with them permanently in his special abode in the second half of the Psalm. Enemy armies flee, yet, paradoxically, come to Jerusalem with gifts; Israel rejoices and exults before God while the enemies melt away and are driven from his presence. Enemy warriors leave their goods in panicked flight, but even those who remain at home in Israel are enabled to share the spoil. The bloodbath of God's enemies (v22,24) is set against the fact that with him there is escape from death (v21). God overturns the categories into which human society divides itself by judging those who have no judge, making prisoners prosperous, strengthening the weary and giving the lonely a feeling of homeliness. He is the one who makes a captive of captivity itself!

Through the juxtaposition of such strongly contrasting images the Psalm attains a boldness and an impressiveness — a sense that God is all-encompassing. Some of the contrasts illustrate two aspects of his nature (violent and peaceful, loving and hating, judging and saving), others are meristic to demonstrate the totality of his influence and power and the universal extent of his purpose; others are antithetical to set those on God's side against those who are not. This usage of contrast and merism thus achieves important literary effects which contribute significantly to the flavour and meaning of the Psalm and which must be fed into the interpretative process.

## ***Other Semantic Domains and Repetition***

### **Ark Language and Cultic Terminology**

It is clear from the procession description v25-29 that the Psalm has an important cultic dimension. This is further encouraged by the quotation of the Ark Saying to open the Psalm. The meaning of the specific terms which may have a cultic significance is discussed in the Notes. Chapter 8.2 contains a discussion of the extent to which the cult can be reconstructed on the basis of the Psalm.

### **Spoils and Gifts**

A number of terms may be grouped together here. The term spoil (שלל) occurs explicitly in v13, followed by a description of the said spoils in the following verse ('the wings of a dove...'). Then there is a reference to gifts in v19 (מחנה) and tribute in v30 (ש'), followed by reference to silver in the following verse. There is a natural progression in this. In the first half of the Psalm, spoils are won directly from battle (v13,14), but the longer term effect is the tribute described in the second half (v30,31). The occurrence of the term מחנה in v19 is anomalous since the giving may be going the other way: from God to his people, rather than from enemies to the people and to God.

### **Singing, Rejoicing and Blessing**

Words from this semantic domain imbue the Psalm with a jubilant mood. The following are found in the opening and conclusion:

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|-----|-----------------|
| v4  | שמח שיש עלץ שמח |
| v5  | עלו סלל זמר שיר |
| v33 | זמר שיר         |

The six synonyms of v4-5 make a most striking display (see Notes).

Various other terms relate to musical worship and occur particularly in the procession passage of v25-29. v35 adds another invocation to praise God: 'Ascribe strength to God / His excellency is upon Israel / And his power in the heavens.'

The root בִּרַךְ can conveniently be grouped with the synonyms discussed here. It occurs three times: v20, 27, 36. It is important not only as a structural marker in the closing part of the Psalm, but also as a link with the other Psalms in the canonical neighbourhood of 68.



The Psalm is one of rousing, vigorous and vibrant praise to God. The placement of these words at the beginning and ending of the work sets the mood for the whole piece and reminds readers (if they were in any doubt!) of what their response to the activities of God recorded in between should be.

## Violence and Warrior Imagery

This group of terms contrasts rather strikingly with the preceding, but is equally characteristic of the Psalm. The scattering of God's enemies has already been dealt with (v2-3,13,15,), and the metaphors used to describe this are graphic even if conventional: God's enemies are to perish like wax melting before fire and smoke being driven away. In v19 God takes captive captivity itself, defeating force with force so to speak.

A contrast is perhaps to be drawn between the two halves of the Psalm. The first uses this stylised language of scattering but refrains from explicit description of scenes of war and destruction by dealing in metaphors. Indeed, the absence of a battle scene just when it is expected in v12 is striking. Instead God merely gives his word and the battle is immediately won. In contrast, the second half of the Psalm twice uses the term  $\gamma\pi\alpha$  in MT (v22,24), alludes to or describes a mythological battle between God and chaos monsters (v23, v20?), delights in the God's smashing of enemies' heads (v22), and looks forward to washing feet in blood and allowing one's dogs to have their fill of it (v24). Finally, God is encouraged to 'rebuke' various creatures in v31 which stand either as mythological enemies or as symbols of enemy nations.

This violent dimension to the Psalm has been clearly appreciated by readers, for it has been an important text for legitimising the use of violence in Christian history (p255-256). It is this dimension which presents one of the greatest challenges in utilising Psalm 68 in theological reflection today.

## Other Repetition

I conclude this chapter with an examination of individual word repetition not hitherto discussed.

Most strikingly of all, perhaps, the word  $\text{לֵא}$  is repeated with some intensity at the close of the Psalm: v29(x2),34,35,36. This is reminiscent of the beginning of the poem with its repetitive use of  $\text{פָּנֵי}$ . In both instances the repetition is of structural significance. Neither term occurs elsewhere in the text, yet is repeated almost overbearingly at the opening and close

respectively. Just as פנה enables the reader to demarcate the opening and draw from it a particular understanding (the emphasis on the term helps focus attention on the presence of God and the fact that the world must be seen in relation to it), so too לו at the close of the Psalm helps demarcate the ending and plants a term in the reader's mind with such force that when one comes away from the Psalm one cannot help but hear this term לו ringing in one's ears.

What does it tell the reader? Why should the text seek to implant *this* term in the reader's consciousness? Because it is a term which captures and seals the mood of the Psalm and which serves to summarise its message about God and his people. What is one to draw from the activities of God which have been described in the Psalm? What is one to make of a God who does such things? Primarily that he is *strong* — this is how he is to be interpreted and understood. And his people are strong too, because he is strong. He gives them the strength they need. There are many deductions and conclusions one *might* draw about God and his people from what the Psalm has said (including negative ones, such that he is cruel, that he is capricious and behaves with unreasonable favouritism, for instance). But the Psalm leaves the reader in no uncertainty as to the primary message that it wishes us to take away. It is a message about God's strength and the strength of his people. It is this strength, this all-pervading power of God and thus of his people too, which is of the essence as far as the Psalm is concerned. As with פנה, the term לו provides a lens through which the Psalm is to be seen and an idea which lingers on after many of the individual phrases and pictures of the Psalm many have slipped away.

Another root of some significance is the root שׁקל. This occurs four times, in v6,18,25,36, and, given the text's concern with the presence and the abode of God, its fourfold occurrence is hardly surprising. The opening and closing sections of the Psalm both have one occurrence each.

Finally, a number of other words reappear in the Psalm, but are of less significance. Those which are potentially of greater interest are listed here:<sup>48</sup>

ישראל	Israel	v9,27
בשן	Bashan	v16(x2),23
קדם	antiquity	v26,34
נתן	give	v12,34,35?,36

<sup>48</sup> Repeated particles such as ׀ and ׀ are omitted. Words appearing only twice or three times and in adjacent or virtually adjacent verses are not listed. Certain very common roots are also omitted.



מֶלֶךְ	king	v13,30 (cf v33: מַמְלִכָה, kingdoms)
אֵיב	enemy	v2,22,24
סָרָר	rebellious	v7,19

To look for significance in the repetition of each of these terms individually would be to overread the text. Nevertheless, taken as a group such repetitions do have a certain effect in reinforcing some of the central concerns of the Psalm and in providing a sense of continuity and familiarity in an otherwise apparently disparate text. In this light it is interesting that a number of them (Israel, kings, enemies, rebellious ones) occur in the first half of the Psalm only to reappear towards the end.<sup>49</sup> The reader revisits ground which has already been covered and groups of people who have already been referred to — an encouraging and welcome experience in a text on which it is difficult to get an interpretative handle. These repeated terms provide unifying contours which help the reader keep on course in the endeavour to make sense of the Psalm.

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<sup>49</sup> On the phenomenon of inclusion see p134-135.

### 1.3. Unusual Vocabulary

The distinctive and unusual vocabulary of Psalm 68 has been emphasised by many exegetes. Battenwieser lists 15 expressions or word combinations which occur nowhere else.<sup>50</sup> He identifies another 12 which occur fewer than 10 times in the Hebrew Bible, and another 12 which occur fewer than 20 times.

Tate makes the point in a different way by counting the lameds found in the *massorah parva* of MT which indicate words which appear in that form in MT on only that occasion.<sup>51</sup> He finds 32. James Sanders comments that each one of these lameds “stands like a soldier to remind the next scribe that the word in question must be copied precisely as written or corrected in the *Vorlage*.”<sup>52</sup> They do not correspond precisely with what modern scholars may identify as hapaxes; generally, hapaxes form a subset of those words marked with a lamed in MT, although there are many hapaxes which remain unmarked, and different manuscripts of MT vary in their use of lameds.<sup>53</sup> The Masoretic practice relates primarily to scribal not philological concerns, but the lameds nevertheless provide a quick guide to the relative ‘abnormality’ of a biblical text in terms of vocabulary and forms employed.

My primary interest here is in words which do not occur elsewhere within the Hebrew Bible and which consequently may present interpretative stumbling-blocks. Battenwieser’s work, referred to above, is less useful here because he lists word *combinations* which do not occur anywhere else, as well as individual words. For instance, he considers עלמורת הופפת to be a unique expression; in one sense he is right, for those words never occur again adjacently in the Hebrew Bible (or even in the same verse). But both of the component words do occur elsewhere and their meaning either separately or in combination is neither in dispute nor a matter of particular note.

What then does one define as a hapax? I shall use the definition of Greenspahn in what is probably the most linguistically competent study of the phenomenon so far in the literature,

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<sup>50</sup> M. Battenwieser, *Psalms*, p30; his lists are found on p33,51.

<sup>51</sup> M.E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Waco: Word Books, 1990), p170.

<sup>52</sup> J.A. Sanders, “Text and Canon: Concepts and Method,” *JBL* 98 (1979), p5-29; here p17.

<sup>53</sup> For more details see F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew – A Study of the Phenomenon and its Treatment since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms* (SBLDS 74; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1984), p1-3.



*Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew.*<sup>54</sup> According to this definition, two classes of hapaxes may be discerned, absolute and non-absolute. An absolute hapax is “any word other than a proper noun which is the only exemplification of its root within the Hebrew sections of the received text as represented in *BHK*,”<sup>55</sup> a word which seems unrelated to otherwise attested roots. By contrast, a non-absolute hapax is a word for which we can find other examples of the root, even if not the same word, or, to put it another way, words which occur only once but which derived from known roots.<sup>56</sup>

The following is Greenspahn’s list for Psalm 68:

Absolute hapaxes

- v18 שִׁנְאָן
- v32 חֶשְׁמֶן
- v17 רִצָּד

Non-absolute hapaxes

- v7 כֹּוֹשֶׁרָה
- v7 צַחִיחָה
- v21 מִרְשָׁעוֹת
- v27 מִקְהֵלָה
- v28 רִגְמָה
- v31 רִץ
- v36 הַעֲצָמֹת

This is a high proportion for a text of the length of Psalm 68. Only the divine speeches in Job along with Deuteronomy 33 have more hapaxes; all other texts have <sup>fewer</sup> less relative to their length. Herden has demonstrated that most hapax legomena within a small selection of text (such as Psalm 68) are also either hapaxes or rare in the larger corpus from which they are taken, suggesting that Psalm 68 uses words which for some reason are genuinely rare, and making it unlikely that the distribution is random.<sup>57</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that hapaxes are often used in the second poetic line of a parallelistic pair.

It must be noted that hapax legomena are a fact of virtually any collection of language; the occurrence of hapaxes in Psalm 68 does not prove that these terms are loan words, made-up

<sup>54</sup> F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*. See also G. Herden, “The Hapax Legomenon: A Real or Apparent Phenomenon?” *Language and Speech* 2 (1959), p26-36.  
<sup>55</sup> F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, p29. Note that in the case of Psalm 68 this excludes a form such as גִּבְנִים: it occurs only here but is excluded since it occurs twice in v16,17.  
<sup>56</sup> F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, p22-23.

forms or words which are for some other reason not really Hebrew words. This cautions against over-hasty emendations and the indulging in philological flights of fancy. Greenspahn also attacks the notion that hapaxes are particularly unclear; in the vast majority of cases the meaning of a hapax can be readily inferred from context and other linguistic clues.<sup>58</sup>

What conclusions may then be drawn from Psalm 68's abundance of rare and unparalleled forms? A possible conclusion which has validity is that Psalm 68 is an ancient text. It is noteworthy that the other texts which have a high proportion of hapaxes are, with the exception of Job, generally agreed to be early. This provides support for attributing the difficulty of the vocabulary and constructions of Psalm 68 to its age. On the other hand, the book of Job illustrates that writers may deliberately employ archaic or unusual languages for particular literary effect (in this case to differentiate God from the other characters, to give him a voice which is 'other'). A similar motivation may lie behind Psalm 68: a writer may have deliberately employed archaic or unusual language to authenticate his message or create an aura about his writing. This is particularly likely if the Psalm had a cultic use. Or again, one may postulate that the unusual language indicates a dialectal dimension in the Psalm's language.

In short, no watertight conclusions may be drawn from this distinctive aspect of the vocabulary of Psalm 68, though the phenomenon must be noted nevertheless. I am inclined to the view that a high frequency of unusual forms is generally indicative of age, and I would take this to be the case for Psalm 68. I recognise, however, the fact that other positions are also valid.

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<sup>57</sup> G. Herden, "The Hapax Legomenon".

<sup>58</sup> F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, p13.



## 2. STRUCTURE

Having examined the vocabulary of the Psalm fairly extensively in the previous part, I now examine how words are combined into lines, lines into strophes, strophes into stanzas, and stanzas into sections. The section concludes with an evaluation of the structure of the Psalm as a whole.

### 2.1. Lineation and Metrical Analysis

In this section I briefly review proposals concerning the nature of Hebrew metre and counting strategies to quantify the length of the poetic line. I then explore an already existing reading tradition — that of MT — examining how the Psalm has been lineated in that tradition, and whether any metrical patterns exist. I then discuss a methodology of lineation and from it produce a lineation of my own, defending my analysis where there are alternative possibilities. I then undertake a more thorough investigation of metrical patterns within this layout of the text. A concluding section will briefly explore the findings of other scholars who have worked on the metrics of Psalm 68.

#### *Theories of Hebrew Metre*

##### Literature Review

The topic of metre in Hebrew poetry is one of the most contentious of all the linguistic issues which arise in the study of the Hebrew Bible. The following is a brief sketch of some well-known theories, including those which have wide currency at the present time.<sup>59</sup>

The traditional approach of counting stresses originated in the work of an earlier generation of scholars such as Ley, Budde and Sievers.<sup>60</sup> These traditional approaches have been

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<sup>59</sup> Other summaries are to be found in: A.H. Bartelt, *The Book Around Immanuel. Style and Structure in Isaiah 2-12* (Biblical and Judaic Studies 4; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996); W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry – A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTS 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), p87-113. Bartelt's treatment is particularly helpful.

<sup>60</sup> J. Ley, *Grundzüge der Rhythmus, des Vers- und Strophen-baues in der hebräischen Poesie* (Halle, 1875); J. Ley, *Die metrischen Formen der hebräischen Poesie* (Leipzig, 1886); K. Budde, "Das hebräische Klagelied," *ZAW* 2 (1882), p1-52; K. Budde, *Der Segen Moses* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1922); E. Sievers, *Metrische Studien* (*Studien zur hebräischen Metrik* 1; Leipzig, 1901); E. Sievers, *Metrische Studien* (*Die hebräischen Genesis* 2; Leipzig, 1904).

criticised by Stuart and others because of their dependence on the Masoretic tradition, although Stuart has probably gone too far in the other direction.<sup>61</sup> Other approaches which may fall foul of Stuart's criticism include those of Kurylowicz, Cooper, and Christensen.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, there are cogent arguments that stress does form the basis of the metrical system of Hebrew poetry,<sup>63</sup> and it is possible to carry out stress counts without over-reliance on MT.

Some variations on the 'standard' system of stress-counts should be noted. Kurylowicz and Cooper count syntactic-accentual units, based on the MT *accentus dominus / servus* distinction. However, since there are few of these accents their analysis gives rise to great differences in line length within a given poem. Christensen counts disjunctive MT accents and *morae* (long and short vowels).<sup>64</sup> The approach of Kosmala who has counted word units may be compared with these.<sup>65</sup>

Other scholars such as Kugel, O'Connor and Pardee have rejected the concept of metre altogether,<sup>66</sup> but in the judgement of many scholars they have not been able to come up with a suitable replacement. Kugel has sought to characterise Hebrew poetry predominantly in terms of parallelism, but this criterion is not sufficient on its own. Even though there may be problems in deciding *what* the metrical system of Hebrew is, there is little doubt among most scholars that there *is* a system of some kind.

Collins has tried to characterise the poetic line in terms of grammatical or syntactic relationships.<sup>67</sup> A more sophisticated development of this is O'Connor's voluminous *Hebrew*

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<sup>61</sup> D.K. Stuart, *Studies in Early Hebrew Metre* (Harvard Semitic Monographs; Missoula: Scholars, 1976). Stuart's work, along with that of Cross his supervisor, has been criticised for over-indulging in emendation. See T. Longman, "A Critique of Two Recent Metrical Systems," *Biblica* 63 (1982), p230-54; here p236.

<sup>62</sup> J. Kurylowicz, *Studies in Semitic Grammar and Metrics* (Prace Jezykoznaze 67; Wroclaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1972); J. Kurylowicz, *Metrik und Sprachgeschichte* (Wroclaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1975); A.S. Cooper, *Biblical Poetics – A Linguistic Approach* (unpublished PhD: Yale, 1976); Christensen's work includes work on Deuteronomy ("Two Stanzas of a Hymn in Deuteronomy 33", *Biblica* 65 (1984), p382-89) and Jonah ("The Song of Jonah: a Metrical Analysis", *JBL* 104 (1985), p217-31).

<sup>63</sup> For instance W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p99-100.

<sup>64</sup> For a criticism of Christensen's reliance on MT, see D.N. Freedman, "Acrostic Poems in the Hebrew Bible", *CBQ* 48.3 (1986), p408-431; here p413-414. On Freedman's view, Christensen is too dependent on MT as an accurate guide to classical Hebrew pronunciation.

<sup>65</sup> H. Kosmala, "Form and Structure in Ancient Hebrew Poetry (A New Approach)", *VT* 14 (1964), p423-445; and *VT* 16 (1966), p152-180.

<sup>66</sup> J.L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981); M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980); D. Pardee, "Ugaritic and Hebrew Metrics," in G.D. Young (ed.), *Ugaritic in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), p113-30.

<sup>67</sup> T. Collins, *Line-Forms in Hebrew Poetry* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978).



*Verse Structure*.<sup>68</sup> Based on the description of a relatively small number of ‘significant’ poetic texts, O’Connor concludes that the colon is bound by a certain number of clause predictors (0-3), grammatical constituents (1-4) and word units (2-5). Recently, William Holladay has re-presented O’Connor’s work with slight modifications in a more user-friendly and less technical form.<sup>69</sup> O’Connor has been criticised for over-simplifying the data, and it has also been pointed out that his system is in itself a kind of simple metre.<sup>70</sup>

Cloete argues that Hebrew poetry is rhythmically structured, and makes use of O’Connor’s constraints *plus* a metrical constraint of 1-4 stresses per colon.<sup>71</sup> It may well be that a combination of syntactic and metrical criteria such as those proposed by Cloete will provide the best description of Hebrew poetry. Cloete’s technique is to describe lines that have already been lineated syntactically; this is a wise decision for it eliminates the danger of mislineating so that a text conforms to an already predetermined metrical scheme.

Other schemes have also been proposed, such as Segert’s constraint that stressed and unstressed syllables should occur one by one in strict alternation, a conclusion which derived from a comparison with late Aramaic and Syriac poetry.<sup>72</sup> Again, Loretz advocated letter-counting in what has been termed a ‘pre-metrical theory.’<sup>73</sup> Neither of these approaches is at all convincing, however.<sup>74</sup>

This leaves the approach of David Noel Freedman. In a great many articles and books Freedman and his followers have used syllable counts as a measure of line length. Criticism is sometimes misdirected at this enterprise — Freedman is not necessarily suggesting that Hebrew has a metrical system based on syllable count, or that Hebrew poets consciously counted syllables. In contrast, Freedman is simply using syllable-counts as a device to

<sup>68</sup> M. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980).

<sup>69</sup> W.L. Holladay, “*Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited* (I): Which Words “Count”?” *JBL* 118:1 (1999), p19-32. A second article appeared in *JBL* the following month.

<sup>70</sup> For criticisms, see, for instance, S.A. Geller, “Theory and Method in the Study of Biblical Poetry,” *JQR* 73 (1982), p65-77, especially p70; W. Cloete, *Versification and Syntax in Jeremiah 2-25* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), p222. See also W. Cloete, “The Concept of Meter in Old Testament Studies,” *Tydskrif vir Semitiesiek* 1 (1989), p39-53.

<sup>71</sup> Cloete describes O’Connor’s criteria as ‘a *component* of meter’ (his italics): W. Cloete, *Versification*, p223.

<sup>72</sup> S. Segert, “Versbau und Sprachbau in der althebräischen Poesie”, *Mitteilung des Instituts für Orientforschung* 15 (1969), p312-321; “Die Methoden der althebräischen Metrik”, *CV* 1 (1958), p233-41; “Problems of Hebrew Prosody”, *VTS* 7 (1960), p283-91.

<sup>73</sup> O. Loretz, “Die Analyse der Ugaritischen und Hebräischen Poesie mittels Stichometrie und Konsonantenzählung”, *UF* 7 (1976), p265-269, and other works. Also S.T. Byington, “A Mathematical Approach to Hebrew Meters” *JBL* 66 (1947), p63-77.

<sup>74</sup> For a brief critique, see W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p103, 105-106.

measure length.<sup>75</sup> His point is that although lines may vary considerably in length, whole poems (and in some cases constituent stanzas of poems) often have markedly similar lengths, despite the variation in individual lines. The proposition is that composition was often carried out (perhaps subconsciously) in such a way as to produce poems and stanzas of particular lengths. On this view, Hebrew poets did have a concept of length, but not necessarily the concept of *line*-length which is so fundamental to much poetry in the Western tradition. Syllable counts provide a particularly good way to measure this; there is less margin for error than with a stress count since a given line always has more syllables than stresses. Furthermore, syllable counts often reveal that lines are of more similar length to each other than may appear when only stresses are counted.

This is not to say that Freedman's proposal is working along the right lines. It is certainly true that syllable-counts do provide an excellent way of measuring length, but the existence of standard-length compositions across a wide corpus of biblical poetry has yet to be demonstrated. Much of Freedman's work has been based on acrostic poems (alphabetic and otherwise) and on Lamentations, and it is very questionable whether the results of such stylised and relatively highly structured poetry can be extrapolated to a typical composition in the Psalter. Some have tried to use syllable counting to demonstrate that the poetic line is usually of a particular length, but it is doubtful that the results are sufficiently regular for this suggestion to carry conviction.

## What to Count?

Despite the disagreement exemplified in the preceding summary, length has been shown to be a relevant factor in the definition and description of Hebrew poetry, whether it be overall line length (measured in syllables) or a rhythmic length based on numbers of stresses and a disregard for intervening unstressed syllables. Scholars who have sought to deny this (Kugel, Pardee, O'Connor) are in the minority, and their own alternative proposals have not received widespread support as they stand as a complete or satisfactory description of Hebrew poetry. Scholars working under quite different understandings of Hebrew metre have been able to show that there is *some* regularity of line length in the texts they have analysed, even if there is considerably greater diversity than one would expect to find in a typical poem in an Indo-European language, say. This rider is important: some have sought to specify a precise system of metre such that all lines conform to an alleged pattern, and emendation has been

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<sup>75</sup> The point has been made by both Freedman and others. A clear statement is found in A.H. Bartelt, *The Book around Immanuel*, p24-30,270.



carried out to conform the text to this predetermined pattern. However, the results have been as unpersuasive as those who have sought to deny metre all together. Some regularity of length is a feature of the poetic line in the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, but there appears to be no rigid control imposed upon it, and poets exhibit considerable freedom in breaking their own norms whenever it suits them. As Watson puts it, "There is metre, yes, but not regular metre, since metrical patterns are never maintained for more than a few verses at a stretch, if even that ... It is this *lack of regular metre* which jars those brought up on (Indo-) European verse and it has to be accepted as part and parcel of Hebrew verse tradition." (his italics).<sup>76</sup>

This regularity of length is best measured by some form of counting — what, though, should be counted? The summary of research has documented some of the possibilities, and they can be divided into broadly two categories: stress/word counts or syllable counts. There are small differences between my method in counting the MT lineated text and the text with my own lineation. These will be explained immediately before the counts are given. In this part I concentrate on the common elements in my approach.

None of the various systems of stress count has won overwhelming support over the others, nor has any yet been shown to produce substantially more consistent or interesting results than any other. Nevertheless, stress counts can vary significantly depending on how closely MT is followed (in terms of irregular vocalisations, the presence or absence of maqqeph), and on decisions regarding how to handle construct chains, prepositions and particles. Furthermore, because a line has few stresses however one decides to count, the variations in results when different counting strategies are employed can be proportionally quite significant. For this reason I give two stress counts, one which follows MT to the letter, and one which is along the lines of the Budde-Ley-Sievers system — perhaps the nearest there is to standardisation.

The MT count counts word units as demarcated in MT (BHS). Multiple words joined by maqqeph receive only one count. This means that in some cases lines of similar length yield different counts because of the apparently arbitrary way maqqeph has been inserted in MT. This can be seen in Psalm 68v12,16. Despite such obvious inconsistencies in MT, the decision was made to follow it to the letter in one of the counts so that it could be determined whether MT has been lineated and/or pointed according to any metrical principles.

The other stress count, loosely based on Budde-Ley-Sievers, employs a rigid methodology, which, though inevitably arbitrary in some respects, is nonetheless consistent with itself. The

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<sup>76</sup> W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p92, 98.

following rules have been employed. Construct chains receive one stress; adjectives and nouns in apposition to other nouns receive their own stress; prepositions do not receive a count unless they occur with pronominal suffixes (as with  $\text{ב}$  in v11,15,18), unbound pronouns and interrogative pronouns are counted (as is  $\text{ו}$  in v29;  $\text{מִי}$  in v28 is also counted); particles such as  $\text{וְ}$ ,  $\text{וְ}$ , and  $\text{אֲ$  are omitted, as is  $\text{וְ}$  in v34;  $\text{לִמְעַן}$  in v24 receives a count. Different decisions could legitimately be defended, particularly concerning pronouns and particles, but these would ultimately make little difference to the overall picture.

As to syllable counts, it is not so important to establish a precise counting system in this case largely because syllable counts should be used to indicate that poetic lines are of *approximately* similar length rather than because of a requirement that lines should have *precisely* the same length. Furthermore, because a given line will contain far more syllables than stresses there is more of a margin for error when counting syllables as against stresses (a difference between 3 or 4 stresses in a line will have a greater impact on whether or not a line conforms to its surroundings than a difference between 12 or 13 stresses by a ratio of  $\frac{1}{4}$  as against  $\frac{1}{13}$ ). It is not so fundamental to a discussion of metrics to ascertain a precise count when syllables are the unit of measure.

These observations have been demonstrated in practice by Freedman's research. While arguing for a particular method of syllable counting which grows out of his understanding of the phonological rules of OT Hebrew, Freedman also frequently includes MT syllable counts as well. He has discovered that MT counts always show the same basic trends as his own counts — one can always tell if lines are of similar length whether MT syllables or some other syllabification is used as the basis of the count. Some of the more intricate and controversial conclusions in which Freedman and followers have argued for a *precise* equivalence of syllables in, say, different stanzas of a poem are always based on Freedman's own counts and fall down when MT counts are used. This perhaps raises a slight question-mark over these results; MT counts yield a *similar* number of syllables, but not the precise correspondence which is alleged for the tailor-made counting system. For present purposes, MT counts are quite adequate and indeed have the advantage in that one cannot 'bend' the count or the counting system to achieve a more attractive result.

The very enterprise of approximating ancient pronunciation is fraught with danger, despite being so necessary if weight is to be attached to a *precise* syllable count. We simply do not know many of the facts concerning ancient pronunciation, and even if a rigorous and consistent system were devised to enable such counts (as Freedman has attempted), then one



would have to be very suspicious of it, for pronunciation varied substantially over the period in which the biblical writings were produced. The very notion of a systematic procedure for syllable counting is problematic for it would either involve the imposition of an inappropriate synchronic grid of pronunciation, or else it would involve a diachronic reconstruction of pronunciation of Hebrew through the biblical period coupled with a dating of each text in relation to this understanding. Too many uncertain assumptions would have to be made in the latter approach to allow any confidence in the results.

One can see these problems being struggled with in the literature of the Freedman school. In his study of Isaiah 2-12, Bartelt recognises the number of places in which different figures could quite legitimately be given as syllable counts for particular lines, and in some cases he gives different counts. Yet he places great emphasis on the equation of the *precise* number of syllables of various complementary sections of his corpus! Little confidence can be placed in the *precise* match given the difficulty Bartelt has had in deciding what to count. It is better to abandon the notion of ascertaining precise counts which reflect particular theories of ancient pronunciation. Instead, syllable counts should be used purely as a way of approximating length.

For all these reasons only one syllable count will be given for each of the two lineations under discussion. This will be a count based on MT: slavishly so when the Masoretic lineation is investigated, more loosely so when my own lineation is analysed. These counts will provide quite sufficient data to evaluate the extent to which Psalm 68 employs lines of similar or differing lengths and whether stress or syllable counts appear more fruitful in describing the poetic form of Psalm 68.

In all my counts the term *selah* is ignored in both syllable and stress counts, and the tetragram receives a count of two syllables. Vocal shewa receives a syllable count.

### ***The Masoretic Tradition***

Before passing to my own lineation and metrical analysis, I shall make some attempt to work with the Masoretic tradition. Looking for logic and patterning within an already established structure is a good antidote to the danger of artificially imposing a strophic structure in order to generate patterns which may not actually be there. I shall be looking at the way MT has broken down the poem into strophes and the implications this has for the way the poem was read and conceived in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

MT-Lineated Text with Syllable and Stress Counts

In this analysis I pay attention to the three most significant disjunctive accents within the three ‘poetical’ books Psalms, Job, and Proverbs: silluq, olevyored and athnach.<sup>77</sup> In the text below, verse divisions are marked as in MT; athnachs are marked by the athnach sign at the end of the line; lines with no sign at the end indicate the presence of olevyored. The Psalm title is ignored, and one extra division has been assumed which is not marked in MT, namely the separation of אלהים ברוך from the final line of v36. This line is clearly a doxology to the poem just as v1 is clearly a title.

The syllable count follows MT slavishly even when its vocalisation appears idiosyncratic. For instance, שכנו in v7 has only two syllables according to MT pointing, since there is no metheg following the qames. This breaks the usual rule for the vocalisation of the qal perfect according to which שכנו would consist of 3 syllables. Another instance is the word המבטורת in v12. The mem has no dagesh forte despite the presence of the article, meaning that, exceptionally, the article does not receive its own syllable. MT is followed so strictly in order to determine whether there may be a metrical basis for its pointing. When I turn to my own lineation on p91, such peculiarities will not be observed, and both of these examples will receive an extra syllable count. Similarly, no emendations are employed in the text below, whereas in my own lineation I will count syllables according to emendations pointed out in the Notes.

	Sylls (MT)	Stress (MT)	Stress (BLS)
2 יקום אלהים יפוצו אויביו.	11	4	4
וינוסו משנאיו מפניו:	10	3	3
3 כהנך עשן הנדך	7	3	3
כהמס דונג מפני־אש.	8	3	3
יאבדו רשעים מפני אלהים:	11	4	3
4 וצדיקים ישמחו יעלצו לפני אלהים וישישו בשמחה:	22	7	6
5 שירו לאלהים זמרו שמו	9	4	4
סלו לרכב בערבות ביה שמו ועלזו לפניו:	19	7	7
6 אבי יחומים ודין אלמנות.	11	4	4
אלהים במעון קדשו:	7	3	3

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of poetic accents see W. Wickes, *Hebrew Accentuation – A Treatise on the Accentuation of the three so-called Poetical Books of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881).



7 אלהים משיב יחידים ביתה מוציא אסירים בכושרות.	19	7	7
אך סוררים שכנו צחיחה:	9	4	4
8 אלהים בצאתך לפני עמך.	12	4	3
בצערך בשימון סלה:	7	2	2
9 ארץ רעשה אף-שמים נטפו מפני אלהים	16	6	5
זה סיני.	3	2	1
מפני אלהים אלהי ישראל:	11	4	2
10 גשם נדבות חניף אלהים.	10	4	4
נחלתך ונלאה אתה כוננתה:	13	4	4
11 חיתך ישוב-בה.	8	2	2
חכון בטובתך לעני אלהים:	13	4	4
12 אדני יתן-אמר.	7	2	3
המבשרות צבה רב:	7	3	3
13 מלכי צבאות יודון יודון.	11	4	3
ונות בית חחלק שלל:	10	4	3
14 אם השכבון בין שפחים	9	3	2
כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף.	9	4	3
ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ:	10	3	3
15 בפרש שדי מלכים בה חשלג בצלמון:	14	6	5
16 הר-אלהים הר-בשן.	7	2	2
הר גבננים הר-בשן:	7	3	2
17 למה תרצדון הרים גבננים	10	4	4
ההר חמר אלהים לשבתו.	10	4	4
אף-יהוה ישכן לנצח:	8	3	3
18 רכב אלהים רבתיים אלפי ענאן.	13	5	3
אדני במ סיני בקדש:	9	4	3
19 עליית למרום שבית שבי לקחת מחנות באדם.	20	7	7
ואף סוררים לשכן יה אלהים:	11	5	4
20 ברוך אדני יום יום יעמס-לנו האל ישועתנו סלה:	19	7	6
21 האל לנו אל למושעות	9	4	3
וליהוה אדני.	7	2	2
למות חוצאות:	6	2	2
22 אף-אלהים ימחץ ראש איביו	10	4	3
קדקד טער.	4	2	2
מתהלך באשמיו:	7	2	2

23 אמר אדני מבשן אשיב.	10	4	4
אשיב ממצלות ים:	6	3	2
24 למען תמחץ רגלך בדם	10	4	3
לשון כלבך.	6	2	1
מאויבים מניהו:	7	2	2
25 ראו הליכותיך אלהים.	10	3	3
הליכות אלי מלכי בקדש:	10	4	3
26 קדמו שרים אחר נגנים.	9	4	4
בתוך עלמות תופפות:	8	3	3
27 במקהלות ברכו אלהים.	10	3	3
יהוה ממקור ישראל:	7	3	2
28 שם בנימן צעיר רדם שרי יהודה רגמתם.	16	7	5
שרי זבלון שרי נפתלי:	10	4	2
29 צוה אלהיך עוז	9	3	3
עוזה אלהים.	5	2	2
זו פעלח לנו:	6	3	3
30 מהיכלך על-ירושלם.	10	2	2
לך יובילו מלכים שי:	9	4	4
31 גער חית קנה עדת אבירים בעגלי עמים מחרפס ברצי-כסף.	24	9	6
בזר עמים קרבות יחפצו:	10	4	4
32 יאחיו השננים מצי מצרים.	11	4	3
כוש תריץ ידיו לאלהם:	8	4	4
33 ממלכות הארץ שירו לאלהים.	11	4	3
זמרו אדני סלה:	5	2	2
34 לרכב בשמי שמי-קדם.	9	3	3
הן יחן בקולו קול עז:	8	5	4
35 תנו עז לאלהים	6	3	3
על-ישראל גאותו.	8	2	2
ועזו בשחקים:	7	2	2
36 נורא אלהים ממקדשיך	10	3	3
אל ישראל הוא נתן עז ותעצמות לעם	15	7	6
ברוך אלהים:	5	2	2
Range	3-24	2-9	1-8
Mean	10.13	3.79	3.35
Standard Deviation	3.96	1.5	1.24



Mode	10	4	3
Median	10	4	3

### Observations

By means of its three most significant poetic disjunctive markers, MT breaks the text up into 76 lines. Analysing the use of the disjunctive markers, the following summary table may be presented:

- 35 body text verses (silluq)
  - 11 verses contain olevyored
    - 9 of these also have athnach
    - 2 have no athnach (5, 36)
  - 30 verses contain athnach
    - 9 of these also have olevyored
    - 21 have no olevyored
  - 3 verses have neither olevyored nor athnach (4, 15, 20)

From this we may conclude that the preferred way to break a verse into two in this text is with athnach (21 verses have athnach and no olevyored); olevyored is generally only used when further division of the two verse-halves is necessary. This can be achieved by use of athnach (9 instances). There are but two exceptions to this rule in which olevyored occurs without further subdivision using athnach (v5,36).

Turning now to the poetic lines themselves, it is immediately obvious both from the layout of the text above and from the results table indicating the range and standard deviation of the data that this arrangement contains both very long and very short lines. These render it impossible to identify any metrical rules or rules of line-length according to which MT has lineated the text. Furthermore, when the long and short lines are examined, it turns out that in these cases there is often little syntactic justification for MT’s lineation either. If, on the other hand, these lines are omitted from consideration, a convincing regularity is seen among the remaining lines. These claims must now be demonstrated.

A convenient starting place for analysis is to consider ‘long lines’ as lines which contain more than 15 syllables, and ‘short lines’ as lines which contain fewer than seven syllables —

leaving 59 remaining lines which contain 7-15 syllables.<sup>78</sup> I shall consider the long and short lines in turn.

There are 8 lines which have more than 15 syllables: v4,5b,7a,9a,19a,20,28a,31a. Of these, four lines (v7a,19a,20,28a) contain an obvious point at which the line could easily be divided, in each case leaving two lines which fall well within the average range for the rest of the poem. MT's lineation makes little syntactic or metrical sense in these cases. Turning to the remaining four lines, v31a could be divided in several different ways depending on the interpretation of that verse; it is clear that it does require further subdivision of some sort. In the case of the remaining three lines (v4,5b,9a), while MT's decision to leave these lines undivided can be understood, each of these lines can be broken down into two regular length lines — in the case of v4 and v5b, for instance, the final clause can be given its own line. It should be noted that in only one example of the entire data set (v9a) were *olevyored* and *athnach* both used in the verse in question; thus in the majority of instances it cannot be argued that MT had no disjunctive markers left to use, or that it used some other disjunctive marker to divide up the long lines. I conclude that MT has no justification, whether metrical or syntactic,<sup>79</sup> for its long lines. In each case the lines in question could be broken in two to yield two average length lines which make at least as much if not more syntactic sense than its present arrangement.

There are 9 lines which have fewer than 7 syllables: v9b,21c,22b,23b,24b,29b,29c,33b,36c. These tend to cluster towards the end of the poem whereas the long lines cluster towards its first half. I can find no explanation for this fact, however; perhaps it is coincidental. In only three cases (23b,33b,36c) is MT's lineation justified on syntactic grounds. In the case of v9b MT's assignment of a separate line to *וְזֶה סִינִי* tends to suggest the Massoretes regarded the phrase as a scribal gloss, although I have argued that this is a mistaken judgement and misses the parallelism of the verse.<sup>80</sup> In each of the other five cases, MT's short line is an incomplete clause which should belong with the preceding or following line. Thus, 21c belongs with v21b, 22b goes with v22c, 24b goes with v24c, 29b goes with v24c. MT's lineation in these examples makes no sense on syntactic grounds since it involves unnecessary fracture of clauses. Furthermore, if the incomplete clauses are joined up with their partners in the manner just described, it turns out that the partner line is always 7 syllables or less, so that

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<sup>78</sup> Both of these syllable count figures yield correspondingly short stress counts; broadly the same group of irregular lines is picked out whether one uses syllables or stresses to determine length.

<sup>79</sup> One might also conceive that a poem could use long lines to perform a structural function such as marking the beginning or end of stanzas or strophes. I can see no such basis for MT's decisions either.

<sup>80</sup> See Notes and p104-105.



there is no instance in which the new line has more than 13 syllables, falling well within the range for the other lines of the poem. Once again, with the three exceptions of v23b,33b,36c, MT's short lines cannot be justified on syntactic, metrical or structural grounds.

It is most interesting that if the remaining 59 lines of the poem are examined — those which fall within the range of 7-15 syllables — there are no further examples of illogical lineation. There may be occasions in which a different lineation is preferable, but MT's lineation always makes sense and is defensible in a way which has consistently *not* been true of MT's long and short lines. A few minor improvements may be made and a few question marks raised over MT's lineation of the rest of the poem, but broadly this lineation makes good sense of the text from a syntactic point of view. For this reason I tabulate statistics for these remaining lines and the three exceptional short lines noted above. The following table illustrates the statistics for lines of 7-15 syllables and the three shorter lines 23b,33b,36c:

Range	5-15	2-7	2-6
Mean	9.54	3.53	3.1
Standard Deviation	2.62	0.97	0.89
Mode	10	4	3
Median	9	4	3

These results form an interesting contrast with the previous table in which all the lines were examined. The mean, median and mode are now usually lower, indicating that the results of the earlier table were skewed by the data from the abnormal and problematic long lines. More important is the difference in standard deviations. The much lower standard deviations in the newer table indicate the overall consistency of line lengths and stresses in MT's lineation of the remainder of the poem. This fact, coupled with the earlier observation about the syntactic soundness of this lineation, points to the following conclusion. At least in the case of this Psalm, MT's lineation as indicated by the three disjunctive markers silluq, olevyored and athnach can be relied upon as providing a sensible and helpful syntactic analysis, *except in the case of very long or short lines*. It is in these long and short lines that MT's usually sound syntactic basis for lineation has derailed, probably through scribal error and for other historical reasons, and it is because of these long and short lines that any metrical patterns or consistency that may exist in MT's lineation is distorted. This suggests that a useful strategy for lineating poetic texts may be to start with MT's lineation, but then to focus particular attention and rework those instances in the text when MT has very long or short lines. It is in these cases that MT is most likely to be in error, as this consideration of Psalm 68 has shown. In the case of Psalm 68, and perhaps for other texts too, MT's lineation for the rest of the

poem will betray both syntactic logic and metrical patterns. It is these to which we must now turn, confining our attention to the 59 lines whose results are tabulated in the previous table.

The range of syllable counts per line is still substantial in the 59 line poem, and no obvious patterns can be detected. It should perhaps be observed that 48 of the 59 lines fall within the range 7-11 syllables which shows that there is a certain consistency of length but certainly no specific pattern. The results are far more interesting when we turn to stress counts, however. Comparing MT counts with BLS counts, the lower standard deviation for the BLS counts indicates that there is much more consistency with this system of counting stresses. Indeed, the regularity of stress counts under the BLS system is quite staggering:

	No. of lines with x stresses					
x	2	3	4	5	6	7
BLS count	15	28	15		2	
MT count	9	18	28	3	1	1

When the BLS count is adopted, there are only 2 lines of the 59 which do not have 2-4 stresses. These two lines are clearly exceptional cases in which the normal rules of composition are broken. All the other lines have either 2, 3 or 4 stresses, arranged in a perfectly symmetric distribution. This makes it likely that a constraint on the number of stresses existed for the composition, a constraint which was only broken in two exceptional cases.

When the regularity of this distribution is compared with the MT counts, there can be no question of the superiority of the BLS count. This evidence from Psalm 68 strongly supports the claim that MT has not been pointed to preserve or demonstrate any principle of metric regularity, or that if it was once thus pointed, history of transmission has perverted the endeavour. However, if construct chains receive one stress each and all intervening unstressed syllables are ignored as per the BLS count, then a clear system can be perceived.

The superiority of BLS counts over MT counts is further established if the number of stresses in couplets and triplets is compared between the two systems. In nine cases (v3,6,8,11,12,14bc,16,25,33) BLS assigns the same count or a closer count to two consecutive lines of a couplet or triplet. It does this *against* an MT stress count which counts different numbers of stresses for the respective lines. BLS either makes the lines the same length in terms of numbers of stresses, or it minimises the disjunction when compared with



MT. There are only three occasions in which an MT count achieves this harmony against BLS (v23,27,32).

## Conclusion

The major disjunctive markers of MT provide a helpful lineation of the poem whose primary motivation appears to be syntactic rather than metrical. Only on occasions when MT gives extremely long or short lines must its validity (as opposed to its correctness) be called into question. In these cases it was discovered that MT had systematically erred in its syntactic analysis, and in so doing it also destroyed the otherwise relatively consistent metrical form. The remaining lines showed considerable metrical consistency in terms of stress counts according to the BLS system.

Syllable counts were of little value in determining the overall metrical shape of the poem, although they are useful as a rough and ready measure of line length for isolating problematic lines in the way just described. As far as stress counts are concerned, a systematic BLS count yielded much more interesting results than a rigid count of MT, indicating that MT has not preserved metrical patterns within its pointing apparatus — this merit of BLS is in addition to its advantage as a consistent system.

According to MT's lineation, the non-problematic lines show the presence of a metrical constraint of 2-4 stresses per line. Free variation is found within that constraint, but there are many examples of lines which contain the same number of stresses, and this criterion of 2-4 stresses per line may usefully be applied when difficult or ambiguous cases of lineation arise in the following attempt to lineate the text.

## *Improved Lineation and Metrical Analysis*

I now put MT's lineation to one side in an endeavour to establish a preferable one. From a methodological point of view it is better to establish a lineation of a text before any counts are undertaken, although exceptionally a lineation may be modified on the basis of strong evidence of stress-count patterns. I now describe a method of lineation, apply it to Psalm 68, and then investigate any metrical patterns which it may yield.

## Method of Lineation

Generally, lineation can be conducted on syntactic grounds quite independently of metre, and in the case of Psalm 68 there are relatively few problems. Most lines will have one main verb

(or an implied verb 'to be'), a subject (implied or explicit), and possibly an object and other elements such as adverbials, complementisers and so forth. This basic form of the line accounts for the vast majority of cases. Sometimes a verb may have been eliminated from a line by gapping (this is sometimes the case in staircase or repetitive parallelism, for instance). Sometimes verbs will be listed, and these may be allowed to coexist in a line provided they have one subject and there are no intervening elements which break up the list (see below on long and short lines). Furthermore, lengthy appositional phrases may be granted their own line in some cases even though they may not have a main verb (such cases may themselves be regarded as a kind of gapping in which the subject and verb have been omitted); this seems preferable to retaining extremely long lines which are out of step with the rest of the poem. I shall highlight these instances when the text is presented according to my own lineation below. There are certain other exceptions also, for poetry is not computer programming. One debated issue is whether or not enjambement or run-over lines are to be found, and with what frequency. Where such matters arise they are discussed in the footnotes accompanying the lineation.

A final matter which arises repeatedly is the question of whether to lineate into long or short lines. If the criterion of one main verb to a line be applied rigidly then this will usually result in short lines — say a quatrain of 2+2+2+2, rather than a couplet of 4+4 with caesuras and internal parallelism within the longer lines. Nevertheless, if the prevailing pattern in the surrounding poem is for couplets, or for lines with four stresses, then the latter may be the most attractive option. This will be an issue at a number of points in Psalm 68. One strategy is to lineate all the lines of a poem in which such decisions do not have to be made, calculate the average line-length for those lines and use this statistic to help inform a decision in the cases of the long-line/short-line dichotomy.<sup>81</sup> I have chosen to work on a case by case basis rather than establish a mechanical procedure, although the BLS results for the preceding analysis of MT will be borne in mind (2-4 stresses per line with 3 the preferred number). The decisions are discussed in the footnotes.

## What to Count

Although the previous analysis has comprehensively shown a systematic BLS stress count to be superior to an MT stress count, I have included the MT count below for completeness.

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<sup>81</sup> This is the method followed by A.H. Bartelt, *The Book around Immanuel* in his study of Isaiah 2-12.



Two important changes have been made with respect to the syllable count. First, MT is no longer slavishly followed, so that irregularities and inconsistencies of pointing in MT are no longer reflected in these counts. Second, certain emendations have been introduced, as argued in the Notes.

Text with Syllable and Stress Counts

	Sylls	MT stress	BLS
2 <sup>82</sup> יקום אלהים	5	2	2
יפוצו אויביו	6	2	2
וינוסו משנאיו מפניו	10	3	3
3 כהנך עשן הנדך	7	3	3
כהמס דונג מפני־אש	8	3	3
יאבדו רשעים מפני אלהים	11	4	3
4 <sup>83</sup> וצדיקים ישמחו	7	2	2
יעלצו לפני אלהים	8	3	2
וישישו בשמחה	7	2	2
5 <sup>84</sup> שירו לאלהים זמרו שמו	9	4	4
סלו לרכב בערבות ביה שמו	13	5	5
ועלזו לפניו	6	2	2
6 אבי יחומים ודין אלמנות	11	4	2
אלהים במעון קדשו	8	3	2
7 אלהים משיב יחידים ביתה	10	4	4
מוציא אסירים בכושרות	9	3	3
אך סוררים שכנו צחיחה	10	4	3
8 אלהים בצאתך לפני עמך	12	4	3

<sup>82</sup> Or, one long line with 2b. There are no strong reasons for dividing one way or the other; the two short lines are very short in terms of syllable count, but the present division gives the first stanza a uniform stylistic character with four triplets and short lines all the way through.

<sup>83</sup> Or, one long line with 4b. In this case the longer line would tend to distort the regularity of line length even if v2ab were made a long line.

<sup>84</sup> Or, two short lines. The present arrangement maintains a regularity of length with the following line.

בצעדך בשימון סלה	7	2	2
9 <sup>85</sup> ארץ רעשה אף־שמים נטפו	12	4	4
מפני אלהים זה סיני	8	4	2
מפני אלהים אלהי ישראל	11	4	2
.			
10 גשם נדבות חניף אלהים	10	4	4
נחלתך ונלאה אתה כוננתה	13	4	4
11 חיתך יִשְׁבוּ־בה	8	2	3
חכין בטובתך לעני אלהים	13	4	4
.			
12 אדני יחן־אמר	7	2	3
המבשרות צבא רב	8	3	3
13 מלכי צבאות ידודון ידודון	11	4	3
ונות בית תחלק שלל	10	4	3
14 אם תשכבון בין שפחים	9	3	2
כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף	9	4	3
ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ	10	3	3
.			
15 בפרש שדי מלכים בה	9	4	4
תשלג בצלמון	5	2	2
.			
16 הר־אלהים הר־בשן	7	2	2
הר גבננים הר־בשן	7	3	2
17 למה תרצדון הרים גבננים	10	4	4
ההר חמר אלהים לשבתו	10	4	4
אף־יהוה ישכן לנצח	8	3	3
18 רכב אלהים רבחים אלפי שנאן	13	5	3
<sup>86</sup> אדני בא מסיני בקדש	9	4	4

<sup>85</sup> Or, two short lines. This would make v8-9 consist of three bicola. Fokkelman argues against this (and implicitly against my analysis also, which he does not discuss), preferring instead to attach ארץ רעשה as a third colon of the preceding verse; this reads the first tricolon as addressed to God and the second tricolon to be about him. J.P. Fokkelman, "The Structure of Psalm 68" in A. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past (Oudtestamentische Studien XXVI)*; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p82, makes quite a point out of this, but I do not find his arguments compelling.



19 <sup>87</sup> עליח למרום שבית שבי	11	4	4
לקחת מתנות באדם ואף סוררים	14	5	4
לשכן יה אלהים	6	3	3
20 ברוך אדני יום יום	7	4	4
יעמס־לנו האל ישועתנו סלה	12	3	4
21 האל לנו אל למושעות	9	4	4
וליהוה אדני למות חוצאות	13	4	4
22 אך־אלהים ימחץ ראש איביו	10	4	3
קדקד שער מתהלך באשמו	11	4	4
23 <sup>88</sup> אמר אדני מבשן אשיב	10	4	4
אשיב ממצלות ים	6	3	2
24 למען חמחץ רגלך בדם	10	4	4
לשון כלביך מאויבים מניהו	13	4	3
25 ראו הליכותיך אלהים	10	3	3
הליכות אלי מלכי בקדש	10	4	3
26 קדמו שרים אחר נגנים	9	4	4
בחור עלמות חופפות	8	3	3
27 במקלות ברכו אלהים	10	3	3
יהוה ממקור ישראל	7	3	2
28 שם בנימן צעיר רדם	8	4	4
שרי יהודה רגמחם	8	3	2
<sup>89</sup> שרי זבלון שרי נפתלי	10	4	2
29 צוה אלהיך עוזך	9	3	3
עווה אלהים זו פעלח לנו	11	5	5

<sup>86</sup> This might conceivably be scanned as two short lines if MT **בם אדני** is retained. They would be too short when compared to the surrounding lines however, and it seems preferable to scan as one line made up as two phrases in apposition to one another. In any case, I prefer **בא מסיני אדני**, which is certainly one line.

<sup>87</sup> Or, two short lines, but they would be unbalanced with the rest of the verse.

<sup>88</sup> Or, two short lines, though compare structural comments on p111-113.

<sup>89</sup> Or, two short lines. These would only have one stress each, however, so it is preferable to retain the long line.

30 מִהִכְלַךְ עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם	11	2	2
לך יובילו מלכים שי	9	4	4
31 גַּעַר חֵית קִנָּח	6	3	2
עֲדַח אֲבִירִים בַּעֲגָלִי עַמִּים	10	4	2
מִחֲרַפֵּס בִּרְצִי־כַסֵּף	8	2	2
בֹּזֵר עַמִּים קִרְבוֹת יַחֲפָצוּ	10	4	4
32 יֵאָחִיז חֲשֻׁמִּים מִנִּי מִצְרִים	12	4	3
כּוֹשׁ תִּרְיֶץ יָדָיו לֵאלֹהִים	8	4	4
33 יִמְמַלְכוּת הָאָרֶץ	6	2	1
שִׁירוֹ לֵאלֹהִים	5	2	2
זָמְרוּ אֲדָנִי סֵלָה	5	2	2
34 לִרְכָב בִּשְׁמִי שְׁמִי־קָדָם	9	3	3
הֵן יֵחָן בִּקְוֹלוֹ קוֹל עֹז	8	5	3
35 חֲנוּ עֹז לֵאלֹהִים	6	3	3
עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל גִּאוּתוֹ	8	2	2
וַעֲזֹז בַּשַּׁחֲקִים	7	2	2
36 נֹרָא אֱלֹהִים מִמִּקְדָּשֶׁךָ	10	3	3
אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא	5	3	2
נִחַן עֹז וַחֲעֻצְמוֹת לַעַם	10	4	4
בֵּרוּךְ אֱלֹהִים	5	2	2
Range	5-14	2-5	1-5
Mean	8.99	3.35	3
Standard Deviation	2.23	0.87	0.87
Mode	10	4	3
Median	9	4	3

<sup>90</sup> On syntactic grounds this line should be joined with the following, but the resulting line is too long and unwieldy. Hence this is probably an instance of enjambement to yield two lines of regular length.

<sup>91</sup> v33 could be divided up in four different ways relative to its three clauses (one long line, three short lines, 2+1 clauses or, as here, 1+2 clauses). The form adopted here has the disadvantage that the first line has only one stress. The vocative is pulled to the front and is in a sense a summons which governs the whole strophe. 33bc are divided to heighten the pattern of short lines that seems to pervade this closing section of the poem (note the syllable counts for v33-36), even though two similar clauses were kept as one line earlier in the poem (v5).



**Observations**

With respect to the division of the poem into strophes and stanzas, there appears to be no formal pattern at work in the poem with respect to length of stanza (such that stanzas consist of a particular number of strophes, for instance).

Neither does there seem to be any pattern concerning the organisation of strophes (such that couplets are followed by triplets, or such that only one form of strophe is found in a particular portion of the poem). No examples of four line strophes have been found, although these could be produced in instances such as v9 if lineation were carried out differently.

Couplets and triplets predominate; there are 21 of the former and 13 of the latter. Triplets are more dominant in the first and final sections of the poem (5 strophes out of 6, and 3 strophes out of 4, respectively<sup>92</sup>), and a further five are to be found scattered throughout the rest of the poem. Section four consists predominantly of couplets.

There are two possible explanations for these facts concerning stanzas and strophes. One is that the structural division of the text into these categories is an imposition of concepts from Western poetics which do not belong here and are not relevant to the analysis of the formal structure of biblical poetry, even though they may help to convey something of the thematic movement of the poem to the analyst. The alternative is that these concepts are relevant to Hebrew poetry in many cases, but that Psalm 68 is a composition which adopts a kind of free form with respect to stanzaic and strophic structure (just as there are such poems in the Western canon).

With respect to line length as measured by syllable counts, a variety is used throughout the composition. With the exception of one stray 14 syllable line, all of these fall within a range of 5-13 syllables with a fairly regular distribution:

	No. of syllables									
	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
No. of lines	6	6	10	13	11	17	8	4	6	1

The regularity of this distribution shows that an ‘average’ line length is a meaningful concept, and that the poem was probably composed with some conscious or unconscious concept of the length of a typical line and a range of lengths within which lines must fall. Nevertheless, this ‘average’ length is only to be taken very loosely. The spread of the

distribution across the range 5-13 syllables — in particular the fact that there are a significant number of examples at both ends of these limits — shows quite definitely that there was no constraint stipulating that lines had to be of a precise length, and that any endeavour to ‘play’ with the text to make lines conform to a particular pattern would be seriously misguided. This point is driven home when the random distribution of these various lengths across the poem is examined. Whilst it is true that under the present lineation the beginning and end of the composition have a preference for shorter lines, the mixture of line lengths even in these parts, let alone the rest of the poem, shows that the poet(s) were not working under any tight constraint.

Turning to stress counts, it is again worth comparing the results for the MT and BLS counts:

	No. of lines with <i>x</i> stresses				
<i>x</i>	1	2	3	4	5
BLS count	1	26	29	24	2
MT count		17	24	36	5

Once again, the symmetry of the BLS count distribution is noteworthy,<sup>93</sup> to the extent that the mean of the distribution is precisely 3 stresses per line. This confirms the earlier conclusion about the superiority of BLS count. Examining the BLS results more closely, those lines with 1 or 5 stresses are clearly exceptional, leaving us with 79 lines which have either 2, 3 or 4 stresses. Although 3 stresses is the most common line form, there are so many lines with both 2 and 4 stresses that it would be foolish to adjust counts to try to achieve greater consistency. Although this may be done in a few instances, in most cases it would be highly forced. This means that the constraint governing the lines of this poem takes the form of a *range* (2-4 stresses), not a precise value. Since this is so, and since there are so many lines which take each one of these three values, one cannot be prescriptive in rearranging the text to yield more consistent results. Any emendations *metri causa* would be ill-advised to say the least, except perhaps in the case of the three lines with either 1 or 5 stresses.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> These are the very sections of the poem which are most subject to different lineations, however, particularly with respect to the choice between long and short lines. It is thus very doubtful whether any weight should be attached to such observations.

<sup>93</sup> If the BLS results above are compared with the results for MT's lineation, the present analysis preserves more lines with 2 and 4 stresses, giving a more even distribution across the range 2-4 stresses per line. This may be due to skewing arising from the omitted lines in the MT count.

<sup>94</sup> The two lines with 5 stresses can both easily be read with 4 without emendation if one relaxes the precise rules made for stress counts on p80-83.



It is also apparent that there are as many strophes which contain lines with differing stress counts as there are which contain lines of the same length. Again, if there were only one or two examples of this, it would be tempting to read the lines in question differently to make them of identical length in terms of stress. There are quite simply too many examples to support such a strategy, however. It is clear that a stress count constraint helpfully accounts for the shape of the poem, but that maximum freedom is exercised within that parameter. Psalm 68 does not manifest a precise system of meter; instead, it operates freely within certain constraints which are themselves of interest.

## Conclusion

Once again, consistent stress counting techniques yield the most interesting results in the investigation of metrical patterns in the poem. An MT stress count appears to preserve no advantages over such a count, and syllable counts show a wide variety of line lengths, even though this variation occurs predominantly within a certain range (5-13 syllables). Compared with such broad variation of line length in terms of syllables, the results for a BLS stress count are of considerable interest. Virtually all the lines of the poem have either 2, 3 or 4 stresses, and lines of these lengths combine in many permutations, though never with more than three lines to a strophe. Psalm 68 thus displays great freedom of line length within this constraint of 2-4 stresses per line.

## 2.2. Analysis of Verses and Strophes

This chapter takes the lines which have been delineated in the previous part and examines how they have been joined together into verses, and then how the verses join and interlock in strophes. In the following chapter I shall turn to the way in which strophes are arranged into stanzas.<sup>95</sup> My eventual analysis will divide the poem into five stanzas and 13 strophes; I read those conclusions back into the earlier parts which discuss verses since it provides a convenient way to break down the text into manageable chunks and does not predetermine the analysis being presented.

### *Parallelism and Organisation of Lines into Verses*

I first examine the internal structure of lines and verses, and also offer comment on the way in which verses link together to form strophes. In the case of Psalm 68, a verse consists of either two or three lines. As many as three or four of these may combine to form a strophe. Fokkelman notes the basic meaning of the Greek term underlying strophe as 'a turning'; a strophe marks a change of direction or development in action or themes within the Psalm.

A brief comment must be made about parallelism.<sup>96</sup> There is little if anything in Psalm 68 which is distinctive as regards this feature of Hebrew poetry, so there is consequently no need for detailed analysis. The types of parallelism manifested in Psalm 68 are characteristic of Hebrew poetry in general, and no particular rarities or surprises can be found.

Furthermore, both the traditional account of parallelism as established by Lowth and his successors,<sup>97</sup> and the various newer approaches<sup>98</sup> could be invoked to analyse and account for

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<sup>95</sup> The terminology I use here is similar to that in Fokkelman, p73. This varies slightly from Watson's terminology in *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p11-15. Two or three *lines* or *cola* combine to form a *verse* ('strophe' for Watson). Two to four of these verses may be combined to form a *strophe* (the original meaning of this term is a 'turn'; it usefully captures the fact that successive strophes are used to signify movement or change of theme during a composition; Watson uses the term 'stanza'). Two to four strophes may be combined to form a stanza (Watson has no equivalent category, though one is necessary I think), and in larger compositions stanzas may in turn be combined into *sections* (I find no need for these in my own analysis of Psalm 68). The limitations of the terminology imported from Western poetics will become apparent as the discussion proceeds. Nevertheless it presents a useful crutch with which to work towards a more nuanced understanding.

<sup>96</sup> Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p114-122 makes the important point that parallelism is only *one* of a number of possible arrangements of poetic lines, the relationship of the second line to the first in a parallel structure being only one of various mathematical analogues by which they may be related (another example would be a chiasmic relationship between lines). Watson discusses other 'automorphisms' by which relationships between objects (including poetic lines) can be expressed.

<sup>97</sup> R. Lowth, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1753; revised 1763) set up a three-fold taxonomy of parallelism: synonymymous, antithetic and synthetic. These categories have been refined



the examples found in Psalm 68. There is little material in the Psalm which would be particularly useful in differentiating or choosing between these approaches. Since the critical cases lie largely elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, I shall not embark on a discussion of these approaches here. The only feature which does deserve particular comment at this juncture is the Psalm's tendency to repeat words adjacently (they may or may not be part of the same colon). The cases are as follows:

v13	ידדון ידדון
v20	יום יום
v23	אשיב אשיב
v34	שמי שמי
v34	קול קול

This technique may be in imitation of Jud 5 (p144-149).

I now proceed through the Psalm strophe by strophe, though the real focus of interest lies in the verse-units within these strophes. The points made to illustrate connections between adjacent verses are themselves the justification for the strophic division, although more discussion is provided later. I discuss the verse-internal and -external structures with a view to better understanding the literary techniques employed in the Psalm. Some general observations will be drawn from this at the end.

Features I shall be observing will include structural arrangements, possible sound patterns and letter repetitions, use of similar syntactic forms and gender relationships. These features further justify the demarcation of lines and verses and help to explain the interrelationships between adjacent material. I use Auffret's study in particular as a dialogue partner, since his analysis of structural matters of these kinds is particularly thorough.<sup>99</sup>

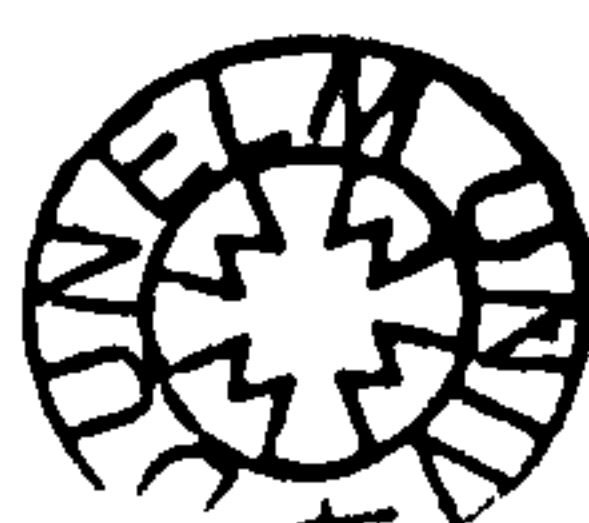
Note: lines are identified by the verse number followed by a, b or c, as illustrated below for v2.

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and added to by his successors. For instance, C.A. Briggs added a further type, emblematic parellism in which obvious comparison is being made, as in Ps 42v2. G.B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915) remains a classic presentation of this traditional approach first advocated by Lowth.

<sup>98</sup> Three treatments particularly stand out. First, J. Kugel, *Idea of Biblical Poetry*, stresses the 'afterwardness' of the second line; his basic characterisation of the parallelistic line is 'A is so, and what's more, B'). Second, A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985); compare also her "Grammatical Aspects of Biblical Parallelism", *HUCA* 50 (1979), p17-43. Third, R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985).

<sup>99</sup> P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël c'est lui. Étude structurelle du Psaume 68" in *Merveilles à nos yeux* (BZAW 235; Berlin and NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1995).



Stanza 1, v2-7

I take this stanza to consist of three strophes, the first of which is made up of two verses as follows.

2a יקום אלהים  
2b יפוצו אויביו  
2c וינוס משנאיו מפניו  
3 כהנך עשן תנך  
כהמם דוג מפני־אש  
יאבדו רשעים מפני אלהים

Lines 2a-c are connected formally in that each opens with an imperfect ayin-waw verb. 2c combines the subjects of 2a and 2b and correspondingly begins with the conjunction waw. There is sound repetition in the triplet by virtue of the ayin-waw verbs, and in the yod/waw vowel sounds of lines 2bc.

3ab both begin with parallel prepositional phrases and verbs which from their consonants *appear* niph'al in form (see Notes). 3bc are linked by the use of מפני, and their similar syntactic makeup reinforces the comparison enemies/wax and God/fire.

The two triplets have connections in the use of the term פנים and the use of אלהים in the first and last lines, in addition to the obvious thematic links. Auffret demonstrates further structure within the verses, a modified version of which is now presented (parallel terms are capitalised; compare the arrangement of material vertically):<sup>100</sup>

GOD arises  
his ENEMIES are SCATTERED  
those who hate him flee BEFORE HIM  
as smoke is driven you drive them  
as wax melts BEFORE FIRE  
the WICKED PERISH  
before GOD

This analysis indicates helpfully the parallel elements within the verses; however, there are also respects in which it fails to capture the structure correctly. It provides no way of capturing the obvious structural symmetry between the two clauses beginning with kaph (3ab), and Auffret's analysis falls down in masking this obvious syntactic arrangement.

<sup>100</sup> P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël", p4.



Auffret also takes his analysis further than I have done here, and in my view becomes less convincing as he does so.

The second strophe also contains two verses (from this point on successive strophes are introduced without prefatory comment).

4 וצדיקים ישמחו  
יעלצו לפני אלהים  
וישישו בשמחה

5 שירו לאלהים זמרו שמו  
סלו לרכב בערבות ביה שמו  
ועלוז לפניו

4a-c each contain a plural imperfect qal as their main verb. There may be sound play in the use of tsade towards the beginning of 4ab and in the threefold sins of 4c.

5a-c each begin with a plural imperative as their main verb and are followed by the preposition ל; 5ab both end with שמו. 5a contains obvious internal parallelism, but the absence of a lamed before שמו may be explained by its absence in 5b.

The short line 5c invites comparison with 4c; both strophes close with a short line consisting of two elements: the first a plural verb prefixed with waw, the second a noun beginning with a preposition. In one sense 5a provides the structural centre of the group v4-5, as noted by Auffret.<sup>101</sup> The two imperatives have two objects, אלהים and שמו. Note that אלהים takes us back into 4a-c (where it occurs at 4b), whereas שמו takes us forward to 5b-c. However, if we pull out 5a as a centre, the two structures are unbalanced in terms of length and number of lines, and we lose the symmetry between the imperatives in 5a-b.

6 אבי יחומים ודין אלמנות  
אלהים במעון קדשו  
7 אלהים משיב יחידים ביה  
מוציא אסירים בכושרות  
אך סוררים שכנו צחיה

6a contains obvious internal parallelism, but is incomplete syntactically until b provides a subject.

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<sup>101</sup> P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël", p5.

The lines of v7 show particularly intricate relationships. 7ab parallel one another in their use of hiphil participles, but there are further connections in the loose sound parallels between יחידים and אסירים and the termination of both lines in a noun prefixed by the preposition ב. 7c stands apart from ab with its different subject and main verb form (a fact which in itself reinforces the adversative אך of 7c), but there are nevertheless important phonetic links between 7bc which binds c into the strophe. These can be illustrated by reference to the diagrammatic presentation below. The tsade of the first word of 7b finds its counterpart in the last word of 7c (1); the second word of both lines show a close sound parallel (2), and the third word of each line contains the consonants shin and kaph (3).

		1 מוציא	2 אסירים	3 בכושרות
אך	2 סוררים	3 שכנו	1 צחיהה	

Structurally, v6 is a reversal of v7. v6 does not state its subject until the end of the verse, first offering two defining expressions but withholding the identity of the one they define. v7, by contrast, fronts the subject with a vocative אלהים, followed by three lines which outline his activities, two in close parallel, and one contrasting because of its description of the rebellious rather than the afflicted righteous.

Four out of five lines in 6-7 begin with aleph, a fact which provides a formal connection between the two verses. Furthermore, the assertions about God made in 6a and 7ab have another point of contact. The genders of the nouns in 6a are patterned m m m f, the same sequence to be found in 7ab if the vocative אלהים is excluded and the participles are regarded as verb forms rather than nouns.

### Stanza 2, v8-15

It is difficult to decide the precise number of strophes in this stanza because of the staccato v12-15.

8 אלהים בצאחק לפני עמך  
בצעדך בישמון סלה  
9 ארץ רעשה אף־שמים נטפו  
מפני אלהים זה סיני  
מפני אלהים אלהי ישראל



If the vocative אלהים of 8a is detached then 8ab begin in the same way: b + qal infinitive construct with second masculine singular suffix. Indeed, the אלהים which opens 8a is balanced by the סלה which closes 8b.

9a manifests obvious internal parallelism, both halves of the line consisting of a noun + verb combination, first in the singular, then in the plural. 9bc manifest close links with one another which can be most effectively illustrated with a diagram:

מפני אלהים	זה	סיני (proper noun)
מפני אלהים	אלהי	ישראל (proper noun)

Because of the parallelism here it seems logical to take זה סיני as a divine title, the structural counterpart of אלהי ישראל. זה may thus be understood either as ‘the one of’ or ‘lord’.

The extensive elaboration on the identity of God in 9ab in which the term אלהים in each line is expanded with a further designation (זה סיני and אלהי ישראל) forms an inclusio with the opening of the stanza which begins with a vocative אלהים in 8a. 8-9 begin and end with God and in between explain his going forth before his people and the earth’s awed reaction. Auffret analyses the structure of these verses in the following way:

GOD,	...went	before YOUR PEOPLE	} common nouns
	...marched	through JESHIMON	}
		the earth shook	
		the heavens gushed	
before GOD		the one of SINAI	} proper nouns
before GOD		God of ISRAEL	}

This is a perceptive analysis. The response of earth and heaven is the centre of the construction.

10 גשם נרבות חניף אלהים  
נחלתך ונלאה אחת כוננתה  
11 חיחק ישברבה  
חכין בטובחק לעני אלהים

10ab appear to be related only in theme, although the link is so strong that formal connections are not really required. Line b interprets and explains the significance of that which is recounted in a. Auffret suggests the following:

you caused a bountiful rain to fall

O God  
 when your inheritance was weary  
 you  
 strengthened (it)

11ab are likewise lacking in formal links, apart from the following:

your beast  
 dwells in it  
 you prepare in your goodness  
 for the poor

כֹּן and יִשָּׁב are regarded as a word-pair by some scholars.<sup>102</sup>

There are a number of interconnections between 10 and 11 which may be schematised thus:

10a: imperfect hiphil, final vocative אֱלֹהִים  
 10b: noun with second masculine singular suffix; perfect verb  
 11a: noun with second masculine singular suffix; perfect verb  
 11b: imperfect hiphil, final vocative אֱלֹהִים

10a and 11b also contain a semantic link: terms expressing the bounty of God (the roots נָדַב and טָוַב). Another link between the two strophes lies in the occurrence of the root כֹּן in 10b and 11b.

12 אֲדֹנֵי יִתְּן-אִמֶּר  
 הַמְּבֹשְׂרוֹת צָבָא רַב  
 13 מְלָכֵי צְבָאוֹת יִדְּוֹן יִדְּוֹן  
 וְנוֹחַ בֵּית חֶחֶלֶק שָׁלָל

The parallelism in 12ab is of the ab-ba variety. The one 'word' which God gives (12a-end) corresponds with the many female 'tidings bearers' (12b-start). The one 'lord' (12a-start) contrasts with the 'great host' (12b-end).

There are further contrasts in v13. The masculine plural 'kings of hosts' who flee in 13a are set against the feminine singular 'beauty of the house' of 13b who stays to share the spoil — the very belongings which the fleeing kings have presumably left behind.

The two verses are also interconnected in an interesting way:

12a: masc sing subject



12b: fem plural subject + root צבא

13a: masc plural subject + root צבא

13b: fem sing subject

In other words, subject genders alternate in an abab pattern, whereas plurality is arranged abba. This abba arrangement, further heightened by the contrast between the mobile activities and hosts of 12b and 13a, and the stationary activities of 12a and 13b, enables a link between the male lord who gives the word and the (feminine) beauty which divides the spoil. Is there the whisper of a suggestion of a relationship between the two such that one is the counterpart of the other? Use of matrimonial imagery to describe the relationship of Israel and God elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible implies that such a suggestion need not be excluded.

14 אם השכבון בין שפחים

כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף

ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ

14ab makes use of a gender contrast to heighten the force of the complementiser ׀. 14a employs a masculine plural imperfect verb and a masculine plural noun. 14b, by contrast, makes use of two feminine nouns before employing a masculine one at the end of the line. It seems appropriate to regard this gender contrast as either a happy coincidence or a deliberate ploy given the gender patterns noted in the preceding verses 12-13. 14bc are both linked to 14a by virtue of a syntactic relationship invoked by the complementiser ׀. bc betray a similar structure to one another:

14b: f pl noun + f sg noun

covered

b + m sg noun

14c: f pl noun + f suffix

< ellipsis >

b + m sg noun

+ adj

The ellipsis of the verb in 14c is balanced by the additional adjective to keep both lines in structural harmony.

There are no formal links between v14 and v15.

15 בפרש שדי מלכים בה

חשג בצלמון

15bc are linked in a temporal relationship dictated by the preposition ׀ which opens the verse. The form ׀ + infinitive construct has not been used since v8, the opening line of the stanza of the poem to which v15bc forms the concluding verse (stanza 2 according to my

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<sup>102</sup> Y. Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 210; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1984), p649.

analysis). It is thus significant that this stanza (v8-15) both opens and concludes with an identical syntactic device — a ‘when’ clause. In both cases (v8ab, v15a) the ‘when’ clause is followed by what might be termed a weather report or a description of the response of nature (v9ab, v15b). This noteworthy parallel is a piece of evidence for the structural analysis to be presented later. v8 and v15 thus form an *inclusio* to the stanza of the poem which deals with the battle between God and his enemies, and both contain a place name which ends with an identical syllable, Jeshimon and Tsalmon. An appreciation of this point eases the interpretation of the otherwise intrusive preposition and suffix בַּהּ. בַּהּ is a catch-all for the whole group of events alluded to in the intervening verses.

### Stanza 3, v16-19

This stanza may be regarded as a single strophe, or can be divided at the end of v17.

16 הַר־אֱלֹהִים הַר־בָּשָׁן

הַר גְּבֻנִים הַר־בָּשָׁן

17 לְמָה חֲרָצְדֹן הָרִים גְּבֻנִים

הַהָר חָמַד אֱלֹהִים לִשְׁבֹּחַ

אֶף־יִהְיֶה יֹשֶׁבֶן לְנִצָּח

The two lines of v16 manifest a very close parallel which does not require expansion. The only alternative is to regard the verse as four successive staccato vocatives.<sup>103</sup>

17ab are linked formally to one another by the term ‘mountain’ as well through their semantic connections. 17bc are similarly linked through the semantic domain of dwelling in the use of the parallel verbs יָשַׁב and יָשָׁן, and the designations for God אֱלֹהִים and יְהוָה.

16 and 17 are closely related in their treatment of God’s mountain and the rivalry of other mountains. More specifically, 16b and 17a share the term גְּבֻנִים. The mountains in 17a are plural, however, and one could use this to argue for a structure of v16-17 in the form: 16ab – 17a – 17bc (2+1+2 rather than 2+3). I prefer the given structure because of the relationship between 17a and 17bc (and because monocolons are otherwise absent in the poem). The jealousy and dissatisfaction of the plural mountains in 17a is a helpful foil for the permanence (stability) and satisfaction of God with the particular mountain that he has chosen.

<sup>103</sup> So J.P. Fokkelman, “Structure”, p81; similarly C. Carniti, *Il salmo 68. Studio letterario (Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 68)*; Roma: LAS, 1985). The sense would be a scornful one; Fokkelman suggests: “O mountain of gods (plural!), O Mount Bashan, O jagged mountain, Mount Bashan // Why so hostile, O jagged mountains, toward the mountain God desired as his dwelling?”



18 רכב אלהים רבחים אלפי שנאן

ארני במ סיני בקדש

19 עליה למרום שביח שבי

לקחת מחנות באדם ואף סוררים

לשכן יה אלהים

18b has internal parallelism, its two halves consisting of a proper noun followed by the preposition כ attached respectively to a pronominal suffix and a noun. This parallelism allows for the interpretation of Sinai either as a divine name, or as a place name (the first clause being a statement about God's location, the second about the location of the sacred place associated with him).

Other lineations of v19 are possible, the most probable alternative being to take יה אלהים as a vocative and move ואף סוררים from 19b to the beginning of 19c; this has the advantage of allowing a parallel to be drawn between v17c (יהוה ישכן ... אף) and v19c (יה ... ואף). It leaves a short second line, however, whereas the present analysis results in two longer lines followed by a short line which thereby receives stress and centres attention on one of the Psalm's key ideas: the dwelling of God. In this, the climactic part of the poem it is more likely that *God's* dwelling be the focus of attention than the dwelling of rebels.<sup>104</sup>

Treating the text as set out above, therefore, 19a consists of two short clauses which both begin with a second person verb. 19b opens similarly, the short clauses hurrying the narrative sequence and propelling the verse towards its climax. The parallelism in 19a is increased by the employment of some semantic redundancy. The first clause consists of two words which relate to the idea of height or ascension (from the roots עלה and רום); the second employs two words which come from the root שבה. By contrast, 19b selects words from somewhat incongruous semantic domains. Gifts are normally 'given' rather than 'taken,' and the oddity of rebels in some way being involved in this is drawn out by the use of אף. The final line of the verse, 19c, sets out the effect or result of the activities of God singled out in 19a-b (though *why* this should be the effect is left for the reader to calculate).

<sup>104</sup> It could be argued that 19bc, the termination of the central stanza of the poem, is to be linked to v7 which closes the first stanza, v1-7, with the dwelling of rebels. Such a parallel would suggest that 19bc is to be taken as 'so that the rebellious might dwell, O God Yah.' This link is quite distant however, and there are no further references to this theme to suggest an overarching pattern of this sort. I thus prefer to connect v19 with v17, as in the body text.

There are echoes of v17 in v19 if interpreted as suggested here, since both climax with the idea of God dwelling as being a major goal of his activities. Both verses are triplets, and the whole section takes the form of couplet-triplet-couplet-triplet.

With this we move into the second half of the poem.

Stanza 4, v20-32

This stanza includes an interlocking pattern of verses which makes it difficult to divide the stanza conveniently into strophes.

20 ברוך אדני יום יום  
יעמס־לנו האל ישועחנו סלה  
21 האל לנו אל למרשעות  
וליהוה אדני למרח חוצאות

20ab contain no formal links, but b provides the reason why God is to be blessed every day.

v21 exhibits a nice sound play both in the concluding terms of lines a and b, מרשעות and לגמור (use of the consonants l-m-w-t). The verse makes extensive use of the consonant lamed (six occurrences; compare the two in 20b).

20-21 are connected in important ways (lines read left to right, though Hebrew words are spelt right to left!):

20a: אדני  
20b: (-) לנו האל root ישע  
21a: האל לנו (-) root ישע  
21b: אדני

These verses contain the first uses of לנו in the Psalm, a term which reappears at its conclusion. This, in addition to the root ברך which opens v20, unifies the second half of the Psalm (v20-36).

There are also connections between v21-22, and for this reason v21 will be repeated:

21 האל לנו אל למרשעות  
וליהוה אדני למרח חוצאות  
22 אך־אלהים ימחץ ראש איביו  
קדקד שער מתהלך באשמו



The ways out from death, spoken of as belonging to God in 21b, are to be set against God's destructive, head-breaking activity in v22a — a contrast pointed up by the adversative ׀א. But there may be more intricate connections:

21a	for us	God of salvation
	21b	ways out from death
22a	head of enemies (them)	(God's destruction, breaking heads)
	22b	one who walks in offences

The parallelism of 22ab is witnessed by the parallel terms קדקד // ראש, and by the final term of each line which begins with aleph and concludes with a third person suffix with a contrasting referent.

It is at this point that the strophic structure of the Psalm becomes more complex. Despite the links between the sequential v21-22, there are more important connections between v22 and v24 and between v21-23-25, the two streams of material being placed into an interlocking arrangement.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the very links noted between 21-22 are connections of contrast which introduce this interlocking arrangement of contrasting material. I shall examine each of the two interlocking strands in turn:

22
אך-אלהים
ימחץ
ראש
איביו
קדקד
שער
מחהלך
באשמיו

24
למען
תמחץ
רגלך
בדם
לשון
כלביו
מאיבים
מגיהו

The internal connections of 22ab were dealt with above. 24ab both begin with lamed and contain words with second person masculine singular suffixes.

The parallels between 22 and 24 are striking. 22a and 24a both use the root מחץ (once with God as subject, once with Israel, the two ‘partners in crime’), while ‘your foot’ in 24a provides an antithesis with the head of God’s enemies (head and foot being opposites). One may also note the hairy scalp of 22b, setting it against the (smooth) tongue of the (hairy) dog in 24b! Fokkelman points out that the higher body parts of the enemy are crushed; the feet and the dogs with their greedy tongues are the victors; traditional values are reversed and

<sup>105</sup> P. Auffret, “Le Dieu d’Israël”, p12-13, also picks up on the relationship between v22/24, but he sees this as part of a chiastic structure with v23 at the centre.

those on the bottom come out on the top of the pile.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the term ‘enemies’ provides an inclusio around v22/24. The verses can be laid out in the following manner:<sup>107</sup>

but God	יִמְחֹץ	the head (1)	of his enemies
		the skull (2) – hairy (3)	מִחְהַלֵּךְ בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת
therefore	תִּמְחֹץ	your foot (1)	in blood
		the tongue (2) – dog (3)	מֵאֵיבִים מִגִּיהֹר

Given these points of contact it might have been expected that these two verses would appear adjacent to one another. Instead they have been spliced with another connected sequence:

21 האל לנו אל למשעות  
וליהוה אדני למוֹת הוצאות  
23 אמר אדני מבֹּשֶׁן אֲשִׁיב  
אֲשִׁיב מִמְצִלוֹת יָם  
25 ראו הליכותֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים  
הליכות אלי מלכי בקדש

Dealing first with the internal structures of these constituent verses, v21 has already been examined above. 23a/b contrast the height of Bashan with the depths of the sea (neither is an obstacle to God’s powers of retrieval), 23a terminating with precisely the same verb form with which 23b begins, and both lines beginning with aleph. 23a is encased in two verb forms both beginning with aleph and qames: the first a perfect, the second imperfect. 25ab are formally related by the repetition of the term ‘processions’, line b furnishing the particulars of their nature.

When the three verses 21-23-25 are set out adjacently, a number of intriguing connections can be perceived. 21a opens by drawing attention to God’s saving works, following this in 21b with reference to the exits from death which he provides. 23 picks this up by describing how God ‘brings back’ from Bashan and the depths of the sea. This can be read fruitfully as a further elaboration of v21. ‘Depths’ are a common image for death in the Hebrew Bible, and the term ‘bring back’ carries strong echoes of Exodus-language and the salvation of Israel from slavery and from the Reed Sea. There is also sound play between מוֹת הוצאות in 21b and מִמְצִלוֹת in 23b.

<sup>106</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, “Structure”, p79.

<sup>107</sup> Indebted to P. Auffret, “Le Dieu d’Israël”, p12.



These themes are taken further in v25 which describes God's processions towards the sanctuary. All three verses employ language of going<sup>108</sup> or bringing, and can each be related to an idealised processional march out of Egypt, through the sea, and into the promised land, culminating in God's destination in the sanctuary. A particularly significant point here is that reading v23 in the light of v21 and v25 enables an otherwise highly obscure and seemingly intrusive verse to be integrated and interpreted naturally within the context.

Looking at the sequence 21-25 as a whole, it is introduced aptly by v20 so that no real breaks are apparent before the interlocking pattern begins. Indeed, v20-21 interface nicely as demonstrated above, v20 thus leading into the sequence 21-23-25, all of which centre on the salvation of God and the triumphant procession which he leads. This is interrupted by the contrasting v22-24 which describes what is happening to the enemies while all this is going on — off-stage, as it were. This yields the following overall structure:

- v20 (introduction: bless God for his salvation)
- + (leads into...)
- v21 (God's salvation & procession)
- v22 (meanwhile ... fate of enemies)
- v23 (God's salvation & procession)
- v24 (meanwhile ... fate of enemies)
- v25 (God's salvation & procession)

The next set of verses, 26-29, form a similar interlocking pattern to the one just described.<sup>109</sup> I shall therefore deal with them out of order, v26/28, v27/29.

- 26 קדמו שרים אחר נגנים
- בתוך עלמות חופפות
- 28 שם בנימן צעיר רדם
- שרי יהודה רגמיהם
- שרי זבלון שרי נפחלי

26a betrays a clear abab parallelism within the line. 26b employs a further term of location, situating the rulers and princes in the midst of the drum-beating women.

<sup>108</sup> The use of the root הלך in v25 may also recall its use in v22.

<sup>109</sup> Compare J.P. Fokkelman, "Structure", p80 who describes the AB-AB pattern in v25-28. v25 and v27 are both addresses and have two words for God. Similarly E.W. Bullinger, *Companion Bible* (Oxford, 1914; reprint Grand Rapids, 1974); C. Carniti, *Il salmo 68*; J. Trublet and J.N. Aletti, *Approche poétique et théologique des psaumes* (Paris, 1983). There is also alliteration between הלכות and מקהילות. v26,28 speak of mortals and proceed as enumerations; v25,27 speak of God.

The final two terms of 28ab begin with resh and end with mem, and the threefold repetition of שׂר in 2bc forms a further obvious link. The three lines of v28 are bound together in constituting the tribal list.

The connection between v26 and v28 is that they both describe Israel's processional worship of God. God's own procession with his people had been described in earlier verses (v21/23/25), but now the text moves on to describe the people's own worship with more precision. The very term שׂ which commences v28 demands a referent, and takes the reader back to v26. Three groups are mentioned in v26, those before, those behind, and those surrounding them. Four tribes are singled out in v28, and the term שׂר is employed three times.

27 במקהלוח ברכו אלהים  
יהוה ממקור ישראל  
29 צוה אלהיך עוזך  
עוזה אלהים זו פעלח לנו

The description of the procession in v26/28 is interspersed with imperative calls in v27 and v29: first to the people to bless God in their assemblies, second to God to strengthen his people and to establish what he has done for them.

v27a calls on the people to bless God, while 27b may be read as providing the reason for that invocation ('the Lord is the source/fount of Israel'). On this reading the verse is constructed in the following way:

27a	x congregations	(bless)	y God
27b	y the lord	(is the source)	x Israel

The first line describes what Israel must do with respect to God (bless him), the second what God does in respect of Israel (he is their source/fount, a metaphor which can be interpreted in several senses — see Notes). 27a is concerned with 'you for him'; 27b deals with 'he for you'. There are also phonetic correspondences between מקהלוח and ממקור (m-q-w).

v29 is constructed in a similar way to v27: the outer elements of each line connecting with one another in a similar x A y // y A x pattern (line reads left to right, Hebrew words are spelt right to left):

29a	x צוה	A אלהיך	y עוזך
29b	y עוזה	A אלהים	x (זו) פעלח (לנו)



The 'x' links proposed here between צוה and פעלח may appear strained until the close connection between word and deed in certain biblical texts is recalled (Gen 1; Ps 33 etc), and the lack of differentiation between 'word/thing' in the Hebrew דבר remembered. v29 is perhaps overdone with its clumsy syntax and repetition, but this lack of fluency was the price of the neat structural symmetry within the verse. There are perhaps phonetic connections also: the two zayins of 29b recall the tsade and zayin of 29a.<sup>110</sup>

The next unit, v30-32, contains the most troublesome verse of the Psalm, v31. However, a close structural examination of the verse coupled with study of the surrounding v30/32 will provide illumination.

30 מהיכלך על-ירושלם

לך יובילו מלכים שי

31 גער היה קנה

ערח אבירים בעגלי עמים

מחרפס ברצי-ככף

בזר עמים קרבות יחפצו

32 יאחיו חשננים מני מצרים

כוש תריץ ידיו לאלהים

v30 continues to refer to God in the second person, as in v29b. The initial words of 30ab both contain second person masculine singular suffixes. In addition, the final word of both lines contains a shin. These correspondences are probably accidental, however. The two lines are incomplete in themselves and combine to form a sentence.

Omitting v31 for a moment, v32 parallels the two terms Ethiopia and Egypt, as do other biblical texts. The two lines also both employ the consonants shin and tsade (one each in 32a and 32b).

Both v30 and v31 speak of the subjection of the nations to God, and their bringing of spoil/tribute before him. 30b informs that 'they will bring' and 31a that 'they will come'. It is in between this pair that v31 is sandwiched.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël", p14, and G. Ravasi, *Il libro dei Salmi. Commento e attualizzazione*, vol. 2 (Bologna, 1983), regard v29 as an independent unit. The points I have brought forward are sufficient to reject that claim.

<sup>111</sup> The analysis of Auffret, "Le Dieu D'Israël", p14 is similar, but contrasts with Fokkelman, "Structure", who instead arrives at a structure 29 + 30 // 31 + 32. It is difficult to see close links between v29 and v31.

v31 is complicated for a number of reasons. It is dominated by construct chains, and their relationship to one another is not immediately apparent. It is difficult to know how to lineate, but for reasons to be explained below I suggest the following (construct chains indicated by em-dashes):

- v31a rebuke beast (Y) — reeds
- v31b congregation/herd (X) — bulls (Y) calves (Y) — peoples (X)
- v31c [ submit selves (hithp) with pieces — silver ]
- v31d scatter peoples (X) wars delight

It is important first to focus on the outside lines, 31ad. These both begin with an imperative verb addressed to God. The surrounding verses 30,32 present a picture of nations coming to God in submission, but the intervening v31 presents a contrasting aside in which God is invoked to drive away those who do not submit in this way (note from v31c that the theme of submission and tribute-paying is still present behind this verse). These two imperative verbs thus provide the interpretative anchor for the verse. The object of the rebuking and scattering is also noteworthy. In 31a it is a beast (Y) which is rebuked; in v32a it is peoples (X) who are scattered. The complexity of the verse derives in large measure from these two apparently incongruous objects and the intermingling of *animal* imagery and reference to *humans*. That this intertwining is deliberate can be seen from v31. Once it is perceived that the verse mixes reference to animals with reference to peoples the structural arrangement of this line can be spotted: XYYX. The construct chains here deliberately reverse animal and human genitives to produce this XYYX pattern. The verse is deliberately intermingling two sets of ideas. One is God's victory over mythological beast(s) (which may be symbolic of Egypt (cf v32), or other nations), and the other is his military conquests over peoples of the earth. Perhaps demythologisation is at work here. The writers had no wish to abandon powerful mythological imagery, but this was now actualised and made relevant in God's wrestling with and conquering of his people's enemies. The result of this rebuking and scattering would be that these peoples (surely not animals!) would submissively pay tribute to him. 31c thus describes the result of ab, while d reasserts what was said in a in order to clarify the thrust of what must have been for any reader a difficult verse in its present form.

This brings us to the final part of the poem.

## Stanza 5, v33-36

This stanza consists of an interlocking structure once more and the verses will be dealt with out of order to illustrate this.

33 ממלכות הארץ

שירו לאלהים

זמרו אדני סלה

35 חנו עו לאלהים

על-ישראל גאוחו

ועזו בשחקים

v33 is a tricolon in which bc are in close parallel, again using the זמר/שיר and אדני/אלהים word-sets. 33a introduces these imperative lines by its vocative summons to the kingdoms of the earth.

v35 similarly opens with a plural imperative form and is thus most closely linked with v33. 35ac both contain the root עו (line b begins with a word commencing with ayin), the use of which provides a link with v34b. 35bc are descriptive of God's power in relation to Israel and the heavens and in this sense provide the motivation for the summons of line a.

34 לרכב בשמי שמי־קדם

הן יתן בקולו קול עז

36 נורא אלהים ממקדשך

אל ישראל הוא

נתן עז וחעצמות לעם

ברוך אלהים

v34 contains two lines both of which begin with an exclamation (for defence of this point, see Notes). Its two lines employ similar techniques of word repetition to divide the line into two parts, the second supplying more information about the repeated word (שמי in 34a; קול in 34b). The first occurrence of these terms is prefaced by a verb plus כ in the respective lines; the second is not. The exclamatory ל of 34 is to be paralleled with הן in 34b. 34b repeats vowel sounds extensively.

v36 is a similar exclamatory doxology or expression of praise. Both v34 and v36 can be read as if addressed to God, and both certainly concern him. Note the sound play towards the end of the respective lines 34a and 36a: sh m sh m q d m // m m m q d sh.<sup>112</sup>

The term עז appears again in 36c, and its recurrence binds together v34-36. Indeed, there are important connections between v35-36 which must also be considered:

<sup>112</sup> Also noted by P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël", p18.



35 חנו עז לאלהים

על-ישראל באוחו

ועזו בשחקים

36 נורא אלהים ממקדשיך

אל ישראל הוא

נתן עז וחעצמות לעם

The middle line in each case contains a reference to Israel (note also the initial **על/אל**). The description of God as the giver of strength to his people in 36c takes us back to 35a in which the people are encouraged to give strength to God. The point is that the people must reciprocate, in some way doing for God what he does for them. The two verses form a chiasmic structure:

v35      give strength to God

his greatness is upon Israel

his strength is in the heavens (sh-q-m)

v36

you are glorious from your sanctuaries (inc. heaven) (m-q-sh)

he is the God of Israel (compare syntax of 35b)

he gives strength and power to his people

The Psalm is concluded with a final doxology: **ברוך אלהים**.

## Observations

The preceding analysis gives rise to the following points:

- A great variety of phonetic, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic patterning is to be found both within and between the component verses. Gender patterning may also be found in v12-14. There are few lines which make no use of such devices, and the poem betrays a greater degree of literary artistry in these respects than has hitherto generally been articulated.
- By and large this patterning occurs at a local level such that one verse might employ, say, assonance, whereas an adjacent verse might employ an entirely different technique. With the exception of the final point below there seems to be little interest from the 'author' in

maintaining consistency in the techniques used; virtuosity appears more important. My work on Judges 5 shows a similar method in operation there.<sup>113</sup>

- Certain verses manifest particularly intricate internal structural arrangements. Notable examples are v7,27,29,31. Appreciation of the poetic virtuosity at work here can enable valuable interpretive insights (v31). Occasionally the desire for intricate structural arrangements and other patterning appears to have given rise to verses which are somewhat clumsy or laboured.
- Adjacent verses are frequently linked by intricate structural arrangements: v8-9, 10-11, 12-13, 20-21, 21-22, 35-36. In some cases items of vocabulary ('catchwords') serve to 'join' adjacent or nearby verses: כֶּסֶף in v10-11; 'silver' and 'spoils' in v13-14; 'peaked mountains' in v16-17; שֶׁשׁ in v20-21.<sup>114</sup>
- Certain structural devices range over larger sections of text (v8-15, see above under v15; v20-36).
- A particularly distinctive technique is the use of interlocking verse structures: v22,24/v21,23,25; v26,28/v27,29; v30,32/v31 (these are all part of a larger structure which begins at v20). The final section of the poem may also be of this type: v33,35/v34,36, although alternative analyses are available in this case.<sup>115</sup> All these examples of interlocking structures occur in the poem's second half.

Close examination of Psalm 68 reveals a great variety and intricacy of structural arrangements and literary devices at work. These create interest and depth for the reader, as well as illustrating virtuosity. It is particularly significant that many of the points which have been observed have illustrated relationships between the constituent verses and strophes of the Psalm; this provides a vital counterbalance to an all too common desire in modern scholarship to splice up the Psalm and regard it as blocks of either very poorly connected or, worse, unconnected material.<sup>116</sup> The technique of linking adjacent verses and strophes through the use of catchwords or structural arrangements has the effect of binding an often seemingly disparate poem together. This is particularly obvious from the fifth and seventh bullet points above. The various strophes take up and build on the themes of their predecessors, and, in the second half of the poem, frequently do so in an interlocking or

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<sup>113</sup> M.A. Vincent, "The Song of Deborah: A Structural and Literary Consideration" *JSOT* 91 (2000), p61-82.

<sup>114</sup> Compare the possibility of two כֶּסֶף in v34-35, and שֶׁשׁ in v22,24.

<sup>115</sup> Compare also the links between v17 and v19: perhaps another alternating structure.

spliced pattern. These formal mechanisms enhance the thematic progression in the Psalm, a progression which may otherwise be in danger of being too dimly perceived.

### ***The Strophes as Units***

I turn now to a briefer discussion of the strophic structure of each stanza (once again, the division into stanzas is not crucial here, and I have yet to argue for it; I assume it merely as a helpful device to make the discussion more manageable). The aim here is to omit the distraction of the detail presented in the foregoing analysis and to try to capture rather more succinctly the thematic movement and shape of the Psalm. I seek to identify the contribution each constituent part of the poem has to make to the ongoing development of thought within it. In picking out the thematic content of each strophe and delineating it from those which precede and follow I am implicitly arguing for the strophic analysis I present.

#### **Stanza 1**

v2-3 describe the arising of God (the first and last character to be named in the strophe) and the consequent flight and destruction of his enemies. God arises; they flee, melt, or are driven away. Five verbs are used to describe their scattering and demise, culminating in the verb **אָבַד**, perish. This last verb provides a contrast with the first verb of the stanza/Psalm, **קָם**, used to describe the powerful arising of God. God is likened to a fire (emblematic of judgement) by the parallelism of v3.

v4-5 expound the relation of the righteous toward God (in contrast to v2-3 which dealt with his relationship with the wicked). Seven different roots are piled together in a description (v4) and then a summons (v5) to praise and rejoice before God. v4 introduces the subject of the verse (the righteous) and then presents two expressions descriptive of their rejoicing (in each case one expression uses the root **שָׂמַח**); these occur either side of the pivot 'before God.' v5 twice refers to the *name* of God which is to be praised, and introduces both an epithet central to the Psalm ('rider through the wilderness') and the name **יְיָ**. The verse ends with the root **פָּנָה**, central to this and the preceding strophe. A deliberate repetition of spirant sounds, particularly the letters **שׁ/שׂ** is perhaps to be discerned in this strophe.

v6-7 is distinguished from the previous two strophes by the absence of the root **פָּנָה**. It consists of a list of attributes of God in the form of copula sentences and participle forms. The order of the copula sentences is inverted in v6 and v7 with the predicate preceding

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<sup>116</sup> See p206-209.



אלהים in v6 and following it in v7. No verb occurs until the last line of the stanza, which is further distinguished by taking ‘the rebellious’ rather than God as its subject (‘but the rebellious dwell in a parched land’). This creates a strong contrast between God who dwells in his holy habitation, causes others to dwell in houses, and brings out prisoners from the prison(-house) — and between the rebellious who dwell in a parched land.

Stanza 2

v8-9 is a flashback to God’s going out before his people and marching through the wilderness, in the words of the Song of Deborah. The change of thought from the previous stanza is further emphasised by the vocative elohim (God is addressed in the second person for the first time). The root פנה now resurfaces and is used three times. Like v4 and v7, the subject of v8 (a vocative) is fronted, and followed by two parallel expressions: ‘O God, when (כ) you ... when (כ) you...’ Further emphasis is given to God’s activities by the use of second personal pronominal suffixes. The stanza ends with a rhythmical couplet which places yet more focus upon God, much like the one in Judg 5v5: ‘before God the One of Sinai // before God the God of Israel’.

v10-11 continues to address God with vocatives in its opening and closing lines; three second person verb forms are found, all with God as subject (notice also the emphatic second person pronoun). The one exception is the line which refers to God’s household dwelling ‘there,’ a troublesome clause on a number of counts (see Notes). The strophe recounts God’s graciousness towards his people in providing bountiful rain and strengthening them even when they are weary. The previous strophe may have pictured God as a mighty warrior marching proudly before his people; this strophe contrasts that image with God’s tender concern for the tired and the poor. The deliberate nature of this juxtaposition may be seen in the inclusio which exists between this strophe and its predecessor: v8 opens with a vocative אלהים, v11 closes with one. The two strophes together form a structural unit, as demonstrated by Auffret.

God  
went ... your people  
marched  
Jeshimon (\*)  
earth  
heaven dropped (ntp)  
before God, lord of SINAI

before God, God of ISRAEL  
rain ... to fall (tnp)  
your inheritance (= land)  
your beast (\*)  
dwelt  
prepared for poor  
God

Auffret comments “Le premier volet nous présente Dieu en son *sortie* dans le *désert*, provoquant les réactions spectaculaires du cosmos, *terre* et *ciel*. Le second, lui répondant point par point, attire notre attention sur le bienfait de la pluie accordée pour cet *héritage* où Dieu veut voir *son peuple habiter*.”<sup>117</sup> Auffret takes the two central capitalised terms Sinai and Israel as explanatory of the asterisked terms in the respective half of the structure (i.e. Sinai helps us understand Jeshimon; Israel explains ‘your beast’: “Les deux noms propres spécifient de quel lieu et de quelles personnes finalement il s’agit.”); the first half of the structure is ‘épique’, the second ‘familiale’.<sup>118</sup> There are limitations to the analysis: the lines in ‘parallel’ are sometimes of quite different lengths (compare רעשה ארץ with נחלתך ונלאה אלה כוננתה).

v12-15. This new strophe opens with a new designation for God, אֱלֹהֵי, and also introduces the term שָׁד towards its conclusion (v15). The juxtaposition of images in this stanza is startling, not to say initially bizarre. First, the (one) Lord who gives the word in v12a is to be contrasted with the great host of tidings-bearers in v12b. The kind of word that is being communicated is also to be contrasted: we infer that the Lord gives a battle-order, whereas the tidings-bearers bring news of victory apparently instantaneously achieved. The host of tidings-bearers is then to be contrasted with the kings of hosts who flee in v13a. These once-mighty kings are in turn to be contrasted with ‘the beauty of the house’ of v13b. The mighty kings should have been taking the spoil, but it is the women of the house who enjoy the plunder (this seems the most probable interpretation of v13b). Further contrasts await us in v14 (notice the second person plural form; is the audience being addressed here?). Those who remained among the hearthstones or sheepfolds now enjoy the glamorous and colourful spoils of the defeated hosts. This is all rounded off by the curt v15: שָׁד has scattered kings, overturning the usual rules of history and military might in a contrast as stark as the white snow falling on a black mountain (see Notes). All the verses of this stanza are abrupt and

<sup>117</sup> P. Auffret, “Le Dieu d’Israël”, p10.

<sup>118</sup> P. Auffret, “Le Dieu d’Israël”, p9.

staccato-like, apart from the obscure v14 which may once have been the climax of the stanza, but now remains shrouded in mystery. Possible interpretations are discussed in the Notes; on the whole this group of verses seems uncomfortably long to classify as one strophe, but it is hard to know how one might sensibly divide it.

### Stanza 3

I take v16-19 to be the central section of the Psalm and abstain from discussing it until the next chapter on the overall structural shape of the Psalm. In his overall chiasmic structural arrangement, LePeau points out that the midpoint of the Psalm falls in the centre of this central stanza: v17//v18.

### Stanza 4

v20-21. The transition to a new strophe, and, indeed, a new stanza, is signalled by an exclamation of blessing and by first person plural pronouns and suffixes (there are three examples — the first such to be found in the Psalm). They illustrate that the implications of the foregoing stanzas for ‘us’ are now going to be laid out; the community is encouraged to respond to what God has done. Two forms of the word ‘salvation’ appear, and the import of this is further emphasised by ascribing to God control over life and death. He is a God not only concerned with marching through wildernesses in procession with his people, but also in providing exits (from the root נצ׳, another verb of motion) from death. This stanza also sees the introduction of the term לֹא־ which will be used relatively frequently in the remainder of the Psalm.

v22,24. The concern of God for ‘us’ his people is contrasted now by verses which reaffirm God’s opposite actions towards the wicked. There will be no ‘way out’ from death for them; instead, God will personally break their heads — walking on in one’s own offences is a certain route to death. This is followed up in v24 by another second person reference, this time in the singular. In the first half of the verse the reader is not quite sure whether ‘you’ should be taken to refer to God (who was spoken of in the third person in v22) or to ‘the people of God’ of which the reader is assumed to be part. Given the mention of ‘your dogs’ later in the verse, one assumes that this is the more likely alternative. Either way, the images of these verses are substantially more gory than anything encountered previously in the Psalm. In the middle of the stanza lies the difficult v23 which is distinguished by containing



the only example of first person speech on the part of God to be found in the Psalm. It does chime with the potentially eschatological victory language of the surrounding verses.

v25. This verse contains a change of subject (an unspecified 'they' whom we may understand to be the defeated enemies from v24) and addresses God in the vocative using second person pronouns once more. The Psalmist now uses first person pronouns to align himself firmly on the side of God rather than with the spectating enemy. Whether the processions which 'they' have seen refer to God's journey through the wilderness from Sinai to Zion, or whether to a ceremonial journey of the ark or some other festal procession, we are not told. As remarked previously, this verse forms the link between the victorious activities of God in v22-24 and the processions of his people in the following stanza.<sup>119</sup>

v26-29. The processions of God's people are now invoked and described. Plural imperatives reappear (after being absent since v4-5) as the various participants are encouraged to take up their positions. The invocation has turned into a straight forward description by v28, however. Terminology associated with music and religious worship is introduced, and some of the participating tribes are listed in v28.

v30-32. The final strophe before the concluding doxologies describes the nations' participation in the processional festivities. Kings bring presents to God's temple at Jerusalem (v30), and Egypt and Cush submit and send ambassadors to him (v32). In v31 God is addressed and called upon to rebuke the beast of the reeds and scatter those who delight in war. There is some unintentional irony in this latter phrase in view of the gory celebrations of God's victory earlier in the poem. The connection between v31 and its environs is the reference to 'those who submit with pieces of silver' which fits into the picture of kings bringing tribute recorded in v30/32.

## Stanza 5

v33,35. These two verses are made up primarily of imperatives which call upon the kingdoms of the earth to praise God (v33) and which summon an unspecified group to ascribe strength to him (v35a). This is rounded off by the statement that his excellency is upon Israel and his power in the heavens (v35b). These two verses appear to be closely related, and are interrupted by v34 which has more in common with the final verse, v36. It may be that an interlocking 'abab' pattern was intended (p116-118), or it could be that the imperatives of

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<sup>119</sup> E.W. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, J. Trublet and J.N. Aletti, *Approche poétique*, C. Carniti, *Il salmo 68*, and J.P. Fokkelman, "Structure", all regard v25-28 as a unit.

v33,35 have become dislocated and the verses accidentally rearranged. The whole world is involved in this call to praise, as evidenced by the occurrence of 'kingdoms of the earth' in v33 and Israel in v35. These verses deliberately pick up motifs from the first section of the Psalm.

v34,36. This strophe opens with a doxological ascription of praise to God in the terms of an earlier part of the Psalm, accompanied by a description of God's thundering in the heavens. v36 addresses God in the vocative and praises his awesomeness. The Psalm closes with a third person description of God as the one who gives strength to his people, followed by a final expression of praise 'Blessed be God!' The term בִּלְהֹדָא thus effectively opens and closes the Psalm. Auffret points out that v33-36 brings together terminology which has occurred in every single preceding unit of the Psalm.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël", p22.

## 2.3. The Overall Structure of the Psalm

Many different structural analyses have been proposed for Psalm 68, although arguments to substantiate these have been few and far between.<sup>121</sup> Rather than presenting and arguing against a series of analyses which I reject I shall present my own breakdown of the Psalm and a defence of that particular analysis. I discuss the major divisions first, then evidence of inclusio and structural symmetry in the Psalm.

### *Preliminaries*

Despite spending quite some time in this chapter on structural analysis I am not suggesting that the composer(s)/editor(s) of the Psalm were working to a precise structural plan of the kind I shall set out (this is not normally how people read poems, and it would not seem likely that it is a normal way of writing them either). Indeed, texts seem to lie on a continuum with respect to their susceptibility to structural analysis. Some texts encourage the reader to note structure by the use of repetends, by other literary/structural devices, and by abrupt thematic shifts — whereas with other texts structural analysis seems to be a technique imposed on the text and not encouraged by it at all. In other words, some texts seem to betray authorial devices to help the reader break them down, whereas with other texts the attempt to analyse and discern structure seems an altogether more artificial process.

Psalm 68 is an interesting case in this light, for it betrays something of both of these poles. Although the Psalm can be broken down fairly discretely at certain points (particularly in the first eleven verses), and although there is some evidence of deliberate literary ploys which encode structure, it is also true that not all parts of the Psalm respond well to this kind of structural analysis. Indeed, it is very apparent that at certain points the attempt to break up the Psalm precisely yields results of limited value and runs against the grain of the sweep or flow of ideas and the multitude of images which are juxtaposed. In these parts it seems wise to recognise that different analyses are viable, *and also that none of them is especially valuable!* It turns out that a procedure which is helpful for large parts of the Psalm (particularly the first 11 verses) turns out to be less so for other parts. The realisation that the attempt to analyse

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<sup>121</sup> The better attempts are those made by C. Carniti, *Il salmo 68*; J.P. Fokkelman, "Structure"; P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël"; J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68*; J. Trublet and J.N. Aletti, *Approche poétique*; J. Ravasi, *Il libro dei salmi*; R.L. Alden, "Chiastic Psalms (II): A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 51-100" *JETS* 19 (1976), p191-200. Auffret's study is particularly illuminating and goes furthest in justifying the analysis proposed.



flounders at certain points and that rival analyses are equally plausible helps the exegete to be aware of the multivalency of the Psalm and of the possibility of looking at it and interpreting it in different ways.

What the attempt to produce a structural analysis of the Psalm *does* achieve is the potential to capture its dynamics in a brief compass (where it starts from and goes to, and what happens in between) — the possibility of saying something about the Psalm, and *grasping* it in some way, without simply reciting it. As has been hinted above, sometimes a structural analysis will do more than this also (since there seem to be literary clues to break the Psalm down in a particular way, thus aiding the process of interpretation); but it will almost always do at least this (even if the results are perceived to be unsatisfactory at certain points, as in this case).

### ***Suggested Analysis***

v2-7 God is praised and defined in relation to righteous and wicked

v2-3 The wicked flee and perish before God

v4-5 The righteous come with praise before God

v6-7 The attributes of God described

v8-15 God goes before his people, giving them rain, victory, and spoils

v8-9 God goes out before his people

v10-11 God's kindnesses to his people (the bountiful rain)

v12-15 God gives the word — kings flee and spoils are taken  
(God's battles and judgement on his enemies)

v16-19 God on high; he ascends to his chosen mountain dwelling

v20-32 Praises and processions in God's honour

v20 Introduction: Bless God for his salvation

v21,23,25 God's salvation and procession

v22,24 Meanwhile ... the fate of his enemies

v26-29 The processions of his people

v30-32 Kings and kingdoms come to praise him

v33-36 Concluding praise and summary of God's power

v33,35 Summons to all nations to praise God

v34,36 Doxologies

## Observations

The analysis above divides the Psalm into five stanzas: v2-7, 8-15, 16-19, 20-32 and 33-36. Although the delimitation of the second, third and fourth stanzas is to some extent problematic (to be discussed shortly), there are a number of attractions of this particular analysis. First, it allows v16-19 to stand apart as the central part of the Psalm. The themes in that section (God's choosing of his mountain and his ascending on high, the statement that he will remain there *for ever*, in contrast to all the movement which the rest of the Psalm contains) make this an attractive option. The theme of God coming to dwell on high becomes the centrepiece of the Psalm and introduces the first occurrence of YHWH. Second, the five-fold structure, with v16-19 at the centre, leaves two sections at either side. There are a number of parallels between these. I deal with verbal parallels below under 'Inclusio', and focus here on thematic links.

The parallels between the opening and concluding sections are particularly striking (v2-7 // v33-36); these can be framed thematically in the following way. v2-7 depicts *the wicked fleeing* from God and *the righteous coming* to him with praises. v33-36 summons *everyone*, of whatever nation they might be, to come and praise him. The polarised world at the beginning of the Psalm (divided into righteous and wicked) is transformed at the end to a world united in submission and praise to God. These two sections with their summons to praise God constitute a doxological ring around the Psalm.

The second and fourth major units can also be fruitfully compared with one another. One of the key elements of both is the idea of *going forth*, whether it be in battle or procession. In v8-15 God goes forth before his people (picking up the language of Judges 5). By this he obtains victory and spoils on their behalf (presumably in battle, although the battle-scene is surprisingly not described). The 'goings forth' of God are again celebrated in the fourth stanza in v25, and this forms the cue for the description of the processions of God's people in v26-29. The primary emphasis of the second section is on *God's* procession through the wilderness; the primary emphasis of the fourth is the procession of *the people* in his honour. A further point of contact between the two sections is the depiction of defeated or fleeing enemies in both (the fourth stanza also contains a contrasting depiction of kings and far-off nations coming to God in submission). Again, the verbal parallels are listed on p134-137.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The parallels developed in this and the preceding paragraph may still hold good if a different analysis of the Psalm were adopted. Nevertheless, the present division, with two sections on either side of the central v16-19, perhaps enables these parallels to be expressed most elegantly.

## Alternative Analyses

There are several alternatives to the division of the Psalm into major sections that I have given. One such would be to take v8-11 as the complete second section of the poem (rather than v8-15), which would leave v12-15 either as an independent section, or would allow it to be linked to v16-19. There is little doubt that the text becomes much harder to break down precisely after v11, and the theme of victory and spoils could be linked either to God's going forth before his people in v8 (probably to battle), or to the 'taking captivity captive' of v19. In the end such judgements become issues of interpretation, and my preference is to keep the unique themes of v16-19 distinct by separating them from v12-15. Even when this is done, it may be that on an interpretational level it is helpful to look at v12-15 independently from v8-11 (for instance, so as to relate v8-11 to the wilderness wanderings, and v12-15 to the conquest of the land; see p168+ and p180 for this suggestion). However, as I shall argue later, v8-15 is unified in that it is a reminiscence of incidents recorded in the biblical history designed to celebrate Israel's past prior to their full establishment in the land.

v16-19 could also be seen as the climactic part of a larger section, v8-19, rather than as an independent section. God's going forth and marching, introduced in v8, could be seen to climax in the ascent to the mount (Zion?) and the defeat of captivity in v16-19. There can be no doubt that the two parts are connected, and while I choose to retain my analysis for the reasons already given, breaking down a text into constituent parts must never be allowed to destroy or obscure the progressions between them.

v20-32 could be broken down in several ways. For example, it would be possible to link v20-21 (and even v22-24) with the victory of v16-19, rather than with the following verses 25-32. Putting v16-21 together would have the advantage of locating both of the two distinctive occurrences of YHWH in the Psalm in what I have proposed as its central section. Against this, however (and in addition to my already repeated point about the attraction of keeping v16-19 on their own) is the placement of the term *selah*. It is almost certain that its occurrence at the end of v8 does *not* split up v8 and v9, but rather indicates that v8 itself begins a new section (hence my division v2-7, v8+). It would make no thematic sense to join v8 with v2-7 and to place the section division at the beginning of v9, since v8-9 are clearly related. This is one of a few examples in which the term *selah* serves as a structural marker, but in which the division *precedes* rather than follows the verse in which the *selah* occurs. The same seems true of the *selah* in v20. v20 and v21 should not be divided, since they both praise God and describe his work as a saviour. Thus, as in v8, the *selah* at the end of v20



suggests that a division is to be discerned at the end of v19. The same applies to the *selah* at the end of v33: it indicates the closure of a major section of the Psalm at the end of v32. Furthermore, the presence of the root בָּרַךְ in v20, the root which re-occurs in the closing doxology of the Psalm in v36, suggests that a major structural division in the Psalm occurs between v19 and v20. A major advantage of this analysis is that it explains the term *selah* as functioning in the same way in each of its occurrences in the Psalm.

These observations about the use of *selah* raise another option: a four-fold division of the text, purely on the basis of the occurrences of *selah*, thus:

v1-7	Introduction
v8-19	God's victory and ascent
v20-32	The response of his people and the nations
v33-36	Conclusion

The attractions of this are: 1) the analysis is driven by an explicit indicator in the text; 2) the second and third sections (the major part of the poem) are of approximately equal length; 3) there is a certain thematic parallel in the climax to the second and third stanzas: God ascends to his mountain abode at the end of the second stanza, and at the end of the third the kings of the earth come to him with gifts and tribute.

Ortlund adopts this analysis, labelling his second and third sections (v8-19 and v20-32) 'Movement of God from Sinai to Zion' and 'Nations' response to the movement of God.'<sup>123</sup> He further subdivides into the following stanzas: 2-4, 5-7, 8-11, 12-15, 16-19, 20-24, 25-28, 29-32, 33-36. Most of these agree with my own strophe divisions.

My analysis differs in that, whilst making use of the occurrences of *selah* as important structural markers in the poem, it does not rely *solely* on these. Furthermore, the parallels I have already developed between sections 1//5 and 2//4 in my analysis, and most particularly, the singling out of v16-19 as the central section of the Psalm outweigh the advantages of the analyses just presented.

Several further possibilities are yet to be considered. One is to assign v25-29 the status of a major section concerning *processions* (or even v25-32; there are perhaps other permutations also). I cannot offer strong arguments in favour of the analysis I have adopted, other than the general one which will follow. There is also a fairly close connection between v30-32 and

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<sup>123</sup> R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985), p506-7.

v33,35, although the placement of the term *selah*, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, suggests that a major division occurs between v32 and v33.

It should be noted that these alternative suggestions of the last paragraph involve a greater fragmentation of the Psalm by creating more sections than the five I have put forward.

However, if possible it is better to keep the number of major divisions of the Psalm to a minimum, since this constitutes a stronger model of its structure, and facilitates a holistic understanding of the Psalm in which the connections between its constituent parts are more readily perceived.<sup>124</sup>

As a conclusion to this discussion of alternative analyses it is important to reiterate the point that, whereas certain parts of the Psalm do support this kind of analysis of the text (and even encourage it by virtue of textual indicators), and whereas certain major divisions seem to be explicitly marked (notably at the end of v7, v19 and v32 by the occurrence of *selah*), it is nevertheless an observable fact that such analysis is not particularly helpful for all parts of the Psalm and can even create more problems for the exegete than she had before the task commenced. Not all texts — and, as we have seen, not all parts of texts — respond to the same kind of analysis or to the application of the same techniques. Although divisions at v7, 19 and 32 are clear, and although there is a certain attraction about the five-fold analysis given in terms of symmetry and as a model or a grid by which to interpret the Psalm, several of the divisions are nothing more than heuristic devices or labels which represent one way of exploring or describing it.

This caveat taken onboard, I shall from this point forwards use the five-fold analysis to study and describe the Psalm. The first task is to more fully describe the literary and thematic features of each part.

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<sup>124</sup> I use the term 'strong' here in the sense in which it is used by the philosopher of science Karl Popper. A strong theory is one which could most easily be falsified (thus a prediction 'it will rain tomorrow' is a stronger prediction than 'it will rain in the future,' since it is more readily falsifiable). Some theories, like a prediction 'it will rain in the future,' are too weak to be interesting. So are some structural analyses, since every change of theme or nuance would be assigned to a new section thus fragmenting the Psalm and failing in the goal of holding it together in some framework. Structural analyses of texts are models which try to capture most elegantly what the Psalm is saying.



## Analysis of Major Units

The opening stanza, v2-7, begins with a quotation of Num 10v33 and concentrates on praising God in general terms aside from any particular interventions of his in history. The term אלהים occurs in every verse, God being the chief character of the whole Psalm. The stanza also introduces us to 'the righteous' and 'the wicked,' two of the three parties who are pivotal to the Psalter,<sup>125</sup> and locates them in relation to God (the one fleeing from him, the other coming to him in praise). The verses which do this (v2-5) are demarcated by the occurrence of the root פנה (p57-58). The stanza is rounded off by two verses which list the attributes of God and which provide a reason why he is being praised (and probably why the wicked are fleeing from him also).

The second stanza, v8-15, also opens with a quotation, this time from Jud 5. It begins to introduce examples of climactic or staircase parallelism, and these features, along with the vocative אלהים, the shift to 2<sup>nd</sup> person, and the *selah* at the end of v8, indicate that we have reached a major structural division in the Psalm. v8 is the only verse in the text which begins with a fronted vocative אלהים. Through the quotation of Jud 5, the greatness of God is now related to history: how God led his people through the wilderness and caused them to conquer the land. Several other changes have taken place in tandem with this. The 'righteous' of the first section are no longer an independent group, but are now related to God by the designation 'people'<sup>126</sup> and by the use of pronominal suffixes. God leads his people, not only by marching in front of them with all his prowess and military power (compare the way in which the ark is recorded to have gone before the Israelites in the wilderness), but also as one who cares and provides for them even when they are weary. A concrete example of this is given in his provision of bountiful rain. It is not long before the action resumes, however, as God enigmatically 'gives the word.' We are not told what kind of word it is, or how it achieves its affect, but immediately 'tidings-bearers' are on the scene, 'kings of hosts' flee in all directions and rich spoil is all around. We can only assume, therefore, that the 'word' was a battle command and that the victory was achieved in so decisive and immediate a fashion that there was not even time or space to record it! The absence of a battle-scene is most striking, and forms a close parallel with Jud 5. In short, this section shows God acting in history: leading, providing, caring and fighting for his people. It is a patchwork of allusions to episodes of the Exodus, wilderness and conquest, as I show in chapter 3.3.

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<sup>125</sup> These are: I/we (the righteous) — you/he (the wicked) — you/he (God).

<sup>126</sup> The term 'inheritance' may refer to the people, although it is usually taken as the land. See Notes.



The central stanza, v16-19, introduces us in most abrupt fashion (even for this Psalm!) to a number of new terms. Mountains (many-peaked ones at that), Bashan and YHWH are all referred to seemingly out of the blue, disorienting the reader.<sup>127</sup> God has chosen to dwell in a particular mountain (astonishingly we are not told which one, although if we were reading canonically we would assume it to be Zion), spurning even the great Mount Bashan.<sup>128</sup> The momentous nature of all this is emphasised by the first occurrence of the name YHWH; it is *he* who will dwell here (note the emphasis on *dwelling*). To do so, he ascends on high, taking captivity captive and bequeathing gifts as he goes. Many scholars recognise v16-19 to be a central structure within the Psalm.<sup>129</sup>

The fourth stanza, v20-32, is the longest and most diverse part of the Psalm. It begins by praising God for his salvation; this includes the victories he has wrought over his (and 'your') enemies. 'They' (the defeated enemies and kings, we presume) 'have seen your processions, O God,' the Psalmist states, and this is a cue for a description of *other* processions, this time before God, not by him. The section thus moves on to consider the response of God's own people in relation to him. They join together in one joyous procession in his honour, singing, playing, and generally rejoicing before him. The processions of the people here parallel the marching forth of God in the second section, creating a loose chiasm. The perspective then widens and we are treated to a glimpse, not only of God's people, but of the other nations also, the other witnesses (and victims) of God's mighty acts. Indeed, the nations and kings witness not only the mighty deeds of God, but the processions of his people also. They watch as the musicians, young women, and princes of various tribes join up to praise God. And not only so; the kings and nations do not merely *see* the processions. They effectively join in them as well by coming to Jerusalem in homage, to bestow their tribute and honour upon God.

<sup>127</sup> Bashan and Zalmon may be related; see p62,63.

<sup>128</sup> This is an interpretation; the Psalm does not say explicitly that Mount Bashan is spurned, and even leaves open the possibility of a reading such that Bashan is the mountain in which God will dwell! The most natural reading is, of course, the one made in the body text: that God chooses Zion (or possibly Sinai) and spurns Bashan.

<sup>129</sup> For instance, P. Auffret, "Le Dieu d'Israël", p24-25,27: v2-15, 16-19, 20-36. The two outside sections each comprise six parts, which can be structurally arranged thus:

1	v2-3 victory over enemies	1	v20-21
2	v4-5 cf *	2	v22-24 victory over enemies
3	v6-7	3	v25-28 cf *
4	v8-9	4	v29 cf **
5	v10-11 cf **	5	v30-32 victory over enemies
6	v12-15 victory over enemies	6	v33-36

The concluding stanza, v33-36, is demarcated not only by *selah*, but also by the occurrence of the root בִּרַךְ, and, more particularly, the insistent repetition of לַע, not to mention the doxological character of its expression. A number of the themes from earlier in the Psalm are drawn together here (see below), and God is praised not just by 'the righteous' (as at the beginning of the Psalm), but now by *all* nations and kingdoms. All are now called upon to bless and praise him, but this international dimension of the Psalm is never allowed to preclude the special relationship of Israel. For them especially, but for all the other nations as well, God is to be blessed.

### *Inclusio / Chiasm*

There are a number of distinctive elements at the end of Psalm 68 which appear deliberately to pick up elements from the beginning of the Psalm. There are as follows:

1. In v33 the kingdoms of the earth are encouraged to sing (שִׁיר) to God, and to play (זמר) to him; in v5 the same two verbs שִׁיר and זמר are again found in the imperative. The audience differs ('the righteous' versus 'all nations'), but the command is the same.
2. v34 refers to God as rider on the heavens (שֹׁכֵן קִדְמוֹת); in v5 God is described as the rider through the desert (עַבְדָּוָה), a term which probably carries a *double entendre* of heaven and a link to the epithet of Baal *rkab 'rpt*). There are the only two occasions in which the participle of רָכַב is found in the Psalter.

These two points compare elements of the last section of the Psalm (v33-36) with the first section (v2-7).<sup>130</sup> The following points compare the final stanza with the second (v8-15).

1. 'He gave (נָתַן) his voice' in v34 is paralleled by God's giving the word (נָתַן) in v12.
2. v35 refers to God's power being in the heavens (עַלְיוֹתָם), and v9 refers to the heavens (שָׁמַיִם) gushing forth water (compare point 2 above).
3. God is referred to as 'God of Israel' in v36 and v9 (using אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל and אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל respectively).

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C. Carmeli, *Il salmo 68*, p64-65, regards v 16-22 as the central section. J.P. Fokkerman, "Structure", takes v16-17 as the central stanza of a bigger central section; E.W. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, sees v16-19 as the centre of v5-36 (v2-4 being introductory).

<sup>130</sup> J.P. Fokkerman, "Structure", p75, also notes these aspects, and refers to a 'doxological ring' surrounding the Psalm. He compares the repetition of the idea of God's strength at the end of the Psalm with the explanation of what that strength implies as described at the outset. These deeds of God at the start of the Psalm are the source of conviction for the assertion at the end.



4. God's sanctuary in v36 recalls his 'holy habitation' in v6 (of the four occurrences of <sup>the root</sup>קדש<sub>λ</sub> in the Psalm, these outermost two refer unambiguously to the sanctuary; the other two in v18 and v25 are potentially ambiguous, although it is probable that sanctuary is the best translation there also).

There are also links between the fourth stanza of the Psalm (v20-32) with the first two stanzas. These contribute to a sense of closure between the first and last parts of the Psalm:

1. Synonyms of scattering, fleeing and perishing are found at v2,13 and v31.
2. God twice gives or utters words (using the root אמר): v12,23. On both occasions the term אדני is used as subject.
3. If 'the source / fountain of Israel' (v27) is an epithet of God, one might link it with God's provision of bountiful rain in v10.
4. The processional language of v26-28 recalls the ambiguity surrounding the verb סלל in v5, one possible translation of which is: 'prepare a (processional) highway' (see Notes).
5. The term עלמות in v26, is phonetically similar to אלמנות in v6. The contrast in meaning of the two terms is also noticeable.
6. The term (ה)י occurs in v11 (of Israel) and v31 (of an enemy nation or leader); one 'beast' or 'flock' is domesticated and cared for by God, the other is wild and must be 'rebuked'.
7. Compare the doubling of ידדן in v13 with the repetition of אשׁב in v23.

Although thematic parallels were found between the first and fifth sections of the Psalm and between the second and fourth stanzas (above, p128), the verbal parallels discerned here between its beginning and ending do not by and large fall discretely into these stanzas. Instead we have found verbal parallels to exist between stanzas one and two as a whole, and between stanzas four and five as a whole. This suggests that it is a mistake to analyse the Psalm according to a tight chiasmic scheme. Rather, the verbal parallels serve to create a sense of closure between the first and latter halves of the Psalm, to create a balance and harmony between the two halves. They also strengthen the earlier insight concerning the unique status of v16-19 as a structural centrepiece. The earlier structural analysis along with the lexical distributions under consideration here both highlight the distinctiveness of that section.



This is not to say that the attempt to find a tight chiastic structure has not been made. LePeau presents the following analysis:

- v2-4 Introduction
  - v5-7 The ideal king
    - v8-11 Procession
      - v12-15 Defeat
        - v16-19 The dwelling-place of God
          - v20-24 Defeat of God's enemies
            - v25-28 Procession
              - v29-32 God's kingship over all
- v33-36 Conclusion

Although visually attractive (as most chiastic structures are), several considerations weigh against this analysis. First, I have already argued for the value of not over-defragmenting the text into too many sections. LePeau has nine, but even then some of his units are underdefined. v20-24, for example, contains more than the defeat of God's enemies, but LePeau is not able to capture this, despite a more detailed breakdown. It is better to capture the dynamics of the Psalm with broader thematic links.

Second, v5-7, which LePeau places under the rubric 'the ideal king,' contain no reference to God as king whatsoever (this designation is reserved for v25, *not* v29-32, where LePeau again introduces kingship). It may be that the attributes discussed in those verses do make for good qualities in a king, but this scarcely justifies one to introduce the idea gratuitously so as to create an inclusio with other verses in which kingship *is* mentioned.

Third, unless the relationship of the 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' are more precisely formulated, these labels cannot themselves constitute sufficient evidence for forming part of a chiastic pattern. The vast majority of texts have introductions and conclusions, but this does not make them chiasms.

Fourth, LePeau's analyses loses the processional ideas inherent in v29-32 and which build on the description of v25-28 in which the theme is dealt with explicitly.

LePeau's is a valiant attempt, and he neatly articulates certain important structural features of the Psalm (the central section, the parallels of procession and defeat in the first and latter halves of the Psalm). Nevertheless, for the reasons given I think his attempt ultimately fails. In sum, the verbal parallels examined in this section between the first and latter halves of the Psalm do not give sufficient evidence to argue for a tight chiastic scheme, but nevertheless

serve to create closure within the Psalm and to emphasise the central section, v16-19. The two halves of the Psalm are neatly balanced both thematically and lexically around that central section.

In conclusion, although no structural analysis is likely to be definitive, I have proposed a scheme which effectively captures the dynamics and key themes of the text, one which enables key linkages and relationships between its constituent parts to be easily articulated.

### 3. INTERTEXTUALITY

Although the term intertextuality is of relatively recent coinage, the phenomenon it describes — the interconnectedness of texts and the way in which texts create worlds of meaning by building on readers' knowledge of other texts — is something which has been exploited by writers for millennia. Both Rabbinic and Christian exegesis have endeavoured to understand and interpret the biblical texts in relation to one another, and have seen in one text echoes, commentary, reworking and development of another. The importance of this kind of exegesis is apparent even within the Bible itself as Fishbane in particular has demonstrated.<sup>131</sup> Thus, in studying the relationship of Psalm 68 to other biblical texts under the heading 'intertextuality' I am pursuing a line of enquiry which is integral to the biblical tradition and its subsequent history. The terminology and insights of intertextuality as crystallised in the literary theory of this century may be used to sharpen and systematise the discussion.

#### 3.1. Background

The work of Roland Barthes in both his structuralist and post-structuralist phases has been particularly important in the development of the understanding of the importance of textual interplay. According to Barthes the world may be seen as a galaxy of texts which interlock and constantly refer to one another. No text can say something entirely new; texts always refer back to the 'already written,' reassembling and redeploying other texts.<sup>132</sup> No text is cut from entirely new cloth; texts rework other texts, and many gain their power precisely because of the way they do this. This has been a most important and revolutionary insight. One of the concerns of his *S/Z* was to examine the different ways in which texts may be connected to this already written. Some texts are 'closed', controlling or dictating, as it were, by the very way the allusions and connections are set up, what sense the reader is to draw. Other texts are more open, writerly (*scriptible*) rather than readerly (*lisible*), since it is left to the interpreter to write in meaning and make what she will of the connections to other texts.

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<sup>131</sup> M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: OUP, 1985).

<sup>132</sup> R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang; London: Fontana, 1972; orig. 1968); *S/Z* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975). For a convenient summary see R. Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989; orig. 1985), p51,80.



Such texts are to be produced rather than consumed when they are read; they require greater interpretive activity from the reader.

Both of these insights — the textual interplay which always must exist between texts, and the differing ways texts may deploy it — are very valuable to the study of Psalm 68. For it is a text which flaunts its connectedness to this already written by both explicit quotation and by piling up allusions to certain other texts which an alert reader cannot miss. Psalm 68 opens with a quotation of Num 10v35, contains two extended quotations of the song of Deborah from Jud 5, as well as important allusions to other biblical texts and perhaps non-biblical ones as well. With its persistent allusion and deliberate reworking of evocative language from other biblical texts, it is particularly important to ask what function is served by this interaction and where the text may sit on Barthes' lisible-scriptible axis.

The importance of textual interplay amongst biblical texts has been articulated more clearly since the developments in literary criticism outlined above. Boyarin's study *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* has also ably demonstrated the dependence of the midrash genre on intertextual connections of the type Barthes powerfully illustrated.<sup>133</sup> Work within biblical Studies which has applied the insights of intertextuality has included studies of the post-exilic literature (in particular the prophets and Chronicles), the Psalms and the gospels.<sup>134</sup>

In their Zechariah commentary, Carol and Eric Meyers have noted that intertextual connections are exploited with particular intensity by post-exilic writers. They comment helpfully as follows:

"The flourishing of intertextuality is, after all, virtually inescapable if the vitality of an old, extensive, sometimes obsolete, and often unactualized—but unfalteringly seen as divine revelation—literature is to be sustained. Second Zechariah thus can be viewed as a kind of proto-midrash, a composite work that simultaneously absorbs and heralds tradition while also transforming it. Thus many of the astute observations of Boyarin (1990) and others in establishing a theory of midrash, with its dialectic of intertextuality, elucidate the dynamics of Second Zechariah. The intertextuality promotes continuity of a fixed, received tradition without

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<sup>133</sup> D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), eg p22.

<sup>134</sup> For instance, D.L. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (SBL Monograph Series 23; Missoula: Scholars, 1977), p15-16 and sources there; B.D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture. Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), or, in briefer form, B.D. Sommer, "Allusions and Illusions: The Unity of the Book of Isaiah in Light of Deutero-Isaiah's Use of Prophetic Tradition", in R.F. Melugin and M.A. Sweeney (eds), *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTS 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p156-186; M. Brettler, "Images of YHWH the Warrior in Psalms," in C. Camp and C. Fontaine (eds.), *Women, War, and Metaphor. Semeia* 61; S. Draisma (ed.), *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings* (Bas van Iersel FS; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1989); C.L. and E.M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14* (AB 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), p44.

freezing it; it generates flexibility and adaptability and so sustains the life and creativity of that tradition . . . This “exegetical consciousness,”<sup>135</sup> by changing the authoritative source, would seem to be destructive of tradition. Yet by invoking it in order to transform it, it also reasserts that source’s authority and constructs a new authority that will both signify and serve a resoundingly positive future.”<sup>136</sup>

These comments are valuable in understanding the reworking of other texts which takes place in Psalm 68. An allusion to another text does not necessarily require that the meaning of the original text be inserted into the new (unless the text is judged to be of the *lisible* type). Rather, allusion and interplay allows a new text to evoke powerful memories of earlier texts, moments, and traditions, and to up-date them, transform them, and apply them to evoke new situations.

A huge number of individual motifs, themes and images employed in Psalm 68 are shared with other texts, especially the Psalms. To catalogue these would not be a particularly illuminating enterprise since some topics (the destruction of enemies, references to and appeals for the arising of God) are so common throughout the Psalter and elsewhere; it is no distinction for Psalm 68 that they occur there also. There are other cases in which a phrase or image in Psalm 68 may have a particularly close verbal parallel in another text, but this may be the only substantial point of contact between the two texts. These cases, when illuminating to exegesis, have been treated in the Notes. This section is instead concerned with the following more extensive examples of intertextuality:

- explicit quotation (and accompanying allusions to other parts of the quoted text) [Num 10; Jud 5]
- texts in which an extensive set of connections can be drawn with Psalm 68 [Ex 15; Dt 33]
- texts which contain a distinctive motif such as God’s arising from the south or descriptions of God’s chariot [Hab 3; Ps 18]
- allusion to ‘historical events’ recorded in the biblical corpus
- allusion to non-biblical texts

I shall deal with these in this order. No attempt is made here to investigate intertextual connections with post-biblical literature.

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<sup>135</sup> Meyers and Meyers footnote here M. Fishbane, “The Qumran Peshier and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics,” in A. Shinan (ed), *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1980), p360-361.

<sup>136</sup> C.L. and E.M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, p49.

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## 3.2. Biblical Quotation and Allusion in Psalm 68

This section considers texts which are either quoted by or contain extensive verbal or thematic parallels with or allusions<sup>137</sup> to Psalm 68.

### **Numbers 10v35**

Psalm 68 opens with what is most naturally taken as a quotation of the Ark Saying or *Ladespruch* from Numbers 10v35, the utterance which Moses made before the ark began its journeys. It could be argued that Psalm 68 represents an earlier version of the saying, but there appears little cause to take such a position. The Numbers text is on face value a record of an ancient cultic saying which Moses spoke, whereas Psalm 68 makes no such claim. On this basis alone the burden of proof must fall on a scholar who alleges Psalm 68 to be earlier. As the whole of this section on intertextuality will show, Psalm 68 engages in textual play with many other texts. It thus makes good sense to regard its opening verse as an instance of just such an interplay, the deliberate echoing of an ancient saying which evoked memories of the ancient cult, of Moses, militant Israel, and the journeys of the ark. It makes less sense for a later writer to ‘create’ an Ark Saying from Psalm 68v2 (when there is no clue in Psalm 68 that this is what the verse is), than it does to regard 68v2 as the quotation of an existing saying.

Less often recognised is an allusion later in the Psalm to the saying which Moses spoke when the ark came to rest: “Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel”. It seems beyond coincidence that **אלפי רבבות** should emerge as **אלפי רבתי** in Psalm 68v18 to describe God’s chariots amongst which he dwells. This is the part of the Psalm in which God has arrived at his destination, has ascended on high to his chosen mountain, and will remain there forever. The presence of God symbolised in the ark has at last come to the place for which it was destined all along. Again, this allusion only works if the Numbers traditions pre-exist Psalm 68. Num 10v33 also records that the ark went before the people as they journeyed; this echoes Psalm 68’s recalling of God’s going forth before his people (v8).

The differences between the Ark Saying of Num 10v35 text and Psalm 68v2 are as follows:

- tense of main verb **קום** (emphatic imperative in Num; imperfect in Psalm 68)

- name of God (יהוה in Num; אלהים in Psalm 68)
- difference in grammatical person (second person in Num; third person in Psalm 68)
- waw before פרוץ in Num

All but the last of these points may be attributed to modification of the saying as it stands in Num (or from some similar form) to its new context in Psalm 68. The use of אלהים is standard for this section of the Psalter; the change of person brings the passage in line with the majority of the Psalm which addresses God in the third person; and the change of tense allows the Psalm to take on meanings beyond the original saying. The extra ך remains as a trivial difference which scarcely requires special explanation. The Psalm appears to have little concern with slavish literality in its use of the saying, but trades rather on the power of evocation.

So why employ the Ark Saying? What effect is achieved by its deployment? On a general level, this evocation of a cultic object and historical ‘event’ of such significance serves to rubber stamp and legitimise the Psalm even as it begins. Here is a Psalm which relates to and continues the audience’s traditions and history,<sup>138</sup> which values and reveres what the audience values, and which in some way relates these matters to the community’s present situation. To begin with such a powerful association gives magnitude to the Psalm, it sounds a trumpet blast for what is to follow. A Psalm which begins in such a way will either sink or swim: it must be great, worthy of its grand opening, or it will be a travesty. In this particular case the remainder of the Psalm is as striking and as grandiose as its opening lines.

But the most fundamental reason for the quotation of the *Ladespruch* is to set the ‘centre’ of the Psalm from the outset. In my opening section I argued for the dominance of the theme of God’s movement and dwelling throughout the Psalm; I suggested that this was its thematic core, and that, once recognised, this centre facilitates the interpretation of the whole Psalm. The opening — the very words of Moses when the ark began its journey — settles this point. The Psalm is about the presence of God, symbolised in the ark of the covenant, which journeyed with his people when they journeyed, and which eventually came to rest on his chosen mountain in his temple at Jerusalem. The Psalm charts the tradition of the journey of God with his people from the days of the ark of the covenant onwards.

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<sup>137</sup> On the term ‘allusion’, see Z. Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion”, *Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976), p105-128. On the distinction between deliberate allusion and coincidence of language, see B.D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, p6-16.

<sup>138</sup> I am assuming an original Israelite audience.

## ***The Song of Deborah***

The Song of Deborah in Jud 5 is the object of both quotation and extensive allusion in Psalm 68. Indeed, the extent of these resemblances is a most remarkable literary feature of the Psalm.

### **Direct Quotation**

Psalm 68v8,9 is close enough to Jud 5v4,5 to be considered a direct quotation in slightly condensed and modified form. I take the Judges passage to be the source for the following reasons:

- Taking the content, setting and claims of both texts seriously, Jud 5 claims to be a much older text. As with Num 10, the burden of proof would lie with the claim that Psalm 68 was earlier.
- Despite dissenting voices, there is a strong scholarly consensus that Jud 5 is one of the most ancient texts in the Hebrew Bible — certainly older than Psalm 68.
- As argued throughout this section, Psalm 68 is a highly allusive text which, from a later historical perspective, refers to many other texts. It makes more sense therefore to posit Psalm 68's reworking of Jud 5 than it does to regard Psalm 68 as a putative original which is quoted by a later Jud 5 masquerading as an earlier text.
- As Fokkelman comments, 'The poet (of Psalm 68) has smoothed the rough profile of the original strophe (i.e. Jud 5) and forged a well-balanced pair of tricola.'<sup>139</sup>

The only consideration which may point in the other direction is certain extra 'explanatory' phrases in Jud 5 which could be regarded as accretions explaining the meaning of the 'original' source of the quote in Psalm 68. 'The heavens also gushed water' in Jud 5 rather slavishly explains the meaning of the previous phrases and is not strictly necessary. However, even if it is correct to regard this as an accretion or explanatory gloss, it is just as possible that it was added by a later editor of Judges 5 rather than as an explanation of a difficult source when the borrowing occurred. This argument is insufficient to overturn those in favour of regarding Jud 5 as the source of the quotation in Psalm 68.

The differences between the two texts are as follows:

- name of God (יהוה in Jud; אלהים in Psalm 68)



- nature/origin of God's going forth (from (מִן) Seir, from (מִן) the field/mount of Edom in Jud 5; before (לְ) your people, in (בְּ) Jeshimon in Psalm 68)
- different particle (the heavens *also*: אֲנִי in Jud 5; אֲנִי in Psalm 68)
- extra phrases to describe the reaction of nature (Jud 5 adds: the clouds also gushed water, the mountains flowed...; however, Psalm 68 continues with גִּשְׁמֵם נִדְבָרוֹת which can similarly be related to the heavens 'gushing', whereas Jud 5 moves on to the next part of the poem).

The first and third points are of little interest. The change of divine name merely brings the citation into line with the general usage of Psalm 68 and of the Elohist Psalter as a whole; the change from אֲנִי to אֲנִי is of no real substance and may be put down to different recensions of Jud 5, or to the poet citing from memory in Psalm 68. The final point may be explained as Psalm 68 slightly condensing its source; at this stage enough of the quotation has been given to render the citation obvious. The Psalm has achieved its purpose in evoking the memories of God's military achievements in Jud 5 and does not wish to stop for further enlargement on the effects of theophany upon nature. Instead the Psalmist wants to use the allusion as a bridge to move from God's military victories to his tender care for his people. The God who so powerfully affects nature when he marches forth in battle is the same God who can carefully control those resources for the benefit of his people.

More significant is the removal of the references to Edom and Seir, and their replacement with a general reference to God's going forth before his people, and the mention of Jeshimon. This has the effect of deemphasising the precise original 'historical' reference of the Judges text, enabling its emotive language to be reworked and applied more generally to God's journeyings with his people and his marching from the south (in a much more vague sense) to his land. The change in the citation lessens the concreteness of the original text and enables it to be applied more fluidly in its new setting.

The citation, then, is not verbatim. These differences serve an important function for the interpreter since they show that the quotation is intended to be allusive and suggestive. The quotation is made for its connotative effect and the associations it carries, not because the poet wants to draw an equation between the subject matter of Jud 5 and the subject matter of

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<sup>139</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, "The Structure of Psalm 68" in A. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past (Oudtestamentische Studien XXVI)*; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p78.

Psalm 68. The reader is not necessarily to transplant the meaning of the Jud 5 passage into Psalm 68.

Allusions to the Song of Deborah

The observant reader quickly spots that the quotation just considered is only the rather obvious starting point for a whole series of connections between the two texts. A whole matrix of allusions back to Jud 5 may be charted as follows (I have listed them in the order they occur in the Psalm; those noted with asterisks are deemed particularly striking):

Judges 5	Psalm 68
v22 etc Sisera fleeing, escaping horses	v1 God's enemies scattered, fleeing before Him
v31 so let all your enemies perish, O Lord	v2 the wicked will perish at the presence of God
v3,12 sing, sing praises	v4,32 sing unto God, sing praises to his name
v4,5 (source of quotation)	v7,8 (quotation, as previously analysed)
v4 heavens gushed, clouds gushed water	v9 plentiful rain
v11 rehearsal of righteous acts of God	v11 tidings bearers
v3,19 kings came and fought (then fled)	v12 kings of hosts flee, they flee
v22 דהרות דהרות	v12 ידדון ידדון
v16 among the משפחים	*v1 among the משפחים (similar, rare word)
v13 the one remaining rules over nobles	*v13 she who remains gets the spoil <sup>140</sup>
v24 praise of Jael, above women in the tent	v13 beauty of the house
v30 no spoil for Sisera	v13 spoil for Israel
v12 lead your captivity captive (to Baraq)	*v18 you led captivity captive (of God)
v18 high places (מרים) of the field	v19 ascended on high (מרים)
v26 Sisera's head smitten, nail in temples	*v21 God shall wound enemies' head, hairy scalp <sup>141</sup>
v2,9 Bless ye the Lord!	v26, 35 Bless God in the congregations
v14,18 Benjamin, Zebulun, Naphtali	*v27 Benjamin, Zebulun, Naphtali <sup>142</sup>
v22 דהרות אבירים	v30 ערת אבירים
v19 they took no gain of silver	*v30 all shall submit with pieces of silver

<sup>140</sup> An alternative reading of 68v13 is as a rebuke for remaining behind, much as Reuben, Gilead, Asher and Dan are rebuked in Jud 5v15-17 (cf v23).

<sup>141</sup> Compare use of מחק / מחץ.

<sup>142</sup> Psalm 68 swaps Judah for Ephraim, Machir (usually taken to be Manasseh) and Issachar. Benjamin attains front position in Psalm 68 (he is behind Ephraim in Jud 5v14). The term שר (prince) is employed in both accounts. Midrash (W.G. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series 13; New Haven: Yale UP, 1959), p548, picks up on the relevance of the tribal list to the victory over Sisera, something which modern scholars have often failed to perceive.



The list of parallels is remarkable, and cuts across large portions of both texts, not just certain tightly inscribed portions. This point holds even if only those parallels marked with an asterisk are considered.

## Function and Purpose of Textual Interplay with Jud 5

How, then, are these connections to be explained? One option is to posit common authorship or a common compositional school for both texts. Both of these alternatives seem unlikely, however. It is difficult to imagine why a single author or group would have wanted to create two texts with such similarities when they deal with different historical periods and quite different activities of God on behalf of his people. Nor does common authorship explain why Psalm 68 should have so many links to other texts in addition to Jud 5 — unless one author wrote *all* the texts in question, a proposition so unlikely as not to deserve serious consideration. Conversely, to suggest that both texts (and others with significant links to them) arose from a common poetic school or tradition is to leave unanswered the question of why Psalm 68 and Jud 5 should be *so* close to one another, much closer than the other texts which might be considered part of the same tradition and whose links to our two texts must also be explained (Ex 15, Gen 49, Deut 33, etc).

We are thus left with the more probable explanation already hinted at, that at least one of the hands involved in the composition and shaping of Psalm 68 was a great admirer of Jud 5 and that there were specific reasons for alluding to it with such deliberation. For example, Jud 5 may have had a particular cultic use which was relevant to the purpose for which Psalm 68 was intended. If the Song of Deborah were linked to a particular festival, for instance, it is quite possible that a writer of new liturgy for that occasion might rework language of the old for the new. Such suggestions, reasonable though they may be, can never be more than suggestions however.

It is highly likely that a major reason for the use of Jud 5 in the later text was to update older traditions, to bring them alive and make them relevant to a new audience, to connect the past with the present and the future. The points made in my introductory discussion of intertextuality and the quotation of Meyers and Meyers are pertinent here. The following points should particularly be noted:

- Much of Psalm 68's archaic feel derives from its reworking of material from Jud 5 (compare Psalm 68v7,8,13,21,30, all of which link to Jud 5). Psalm 68 exudes an impression of authority and grandeur by reusing this material.



- The use of Jud 5 makes a theological point: it is the same God, working in similar ways, who is active in Israel's history. What God enables Baraq to do in Jud 5v12 he does again himself in Psalm 68v19 (leading captivity captive). Once again he scatters enemies who flee, spoils are taken, and the news of it is reported far and wide. God's behaviour is distinctive yet patterned.
- The militant spirit of Psalm 68 derives in large measure from its use of Jud 5 (compare Psalm 68v1-2,7,12,18,21,30); Psalm 68 claims the glory days of Deborah for the present and future *it* describes. The military language of one of God's classic battles (Jud 5) is used to describe Israel's march through the wilderness with God at the head, and the ensuing conquest of the land.
- The future submission of all nations depicted towards the end of Psalm 68 is captured in the language of God's earlier subjection of Sisera and his armies. The victorious God of the past will again conquer the nations. The past authenticates the future.

In short, it is a reasonable assumption that Jud 5 was a well-known, ancient and powerful victory ballad which celebrated a decisive victory of Israelite tribes over a Canaanite enemy (hence its inclusion as a poetic inset in the Judges narrative). That concrete example of Israel's military strength predicated on God's power and support provided an excellent specific example which Psalm 68 could rework in order to make more general and theological points about God and his purpose with Israel and the nations. Jud 5 provided imagery and language which, in an authoritative way, could be used to explain God's march with his people through the wilderness with the ark, the establishment of the Monarchy and temple, and a vision of future conquest.

In its narrative context Jud 5 describes an Israel who have already arrived in the land and conquered it, but who are now under threat from nations who would drive them out. The Sisera incident worked as a decisive illustration that they would remain in the land to which they had been brought, and that those who thought otherwise would be subdued. This is highly relevant to the establishment of the Monarchy and First Temple worship. The ark had now ascended Zion and God's temple at Jerusalem was established (so says the biblical history). But what would happen next? The prototype of Jud 5 asserts that those who had been driven out would remain out, that invaders would be put down, and that the extent of God's dominion and the flight and submission of his enemies would increase, not decrease. Jud 5 helps Psalm 68 make a central theological point: God's rule is here to stay, and his kingdom is and will be established. It serves as a covert proof-text for Psalm 68's vision: both

the Sinai revelation and the defeat of Sisera are seen as essential proofs of God's promise to his people, one at the beginning and one at the end of the long wilderness march.

Psalm 68 thus captures the memories of these victories of God and reworks them in a new context, updating and extending the tradition. The same God who drove out the nations and vanquished kings has chosen Jerusalem as his city and caused the ark to ascend into it. God is still giving victory over his enemies and the enemies of his people. Israel has won the land and God's leadership will ultimately embrace all nations — this is the claim of the Psalm.

### ***The Song of the Sea***

Although neither as numerous nor as close as the parallels with the Song of Deborah, there are nevertheless important connections to be drawn between Psalm 68 and the Song of the Sea in Ex 15.<sup>143</sup> These will form the first part of my discussion. More important than these verbal parallels, however, is the similar thematic movement which can be traced in both texts and which I develop second. I conclude with a brief investigation of the dating and unity of Ex 15 and its implications.

### **Verbal Parallels with Psalm 68**

The following verbal parallels may be noted (68vX refers to the occurrence of the parallel in Psalm 68; 15vX refers to Exodus 15):

1. References to the sanctuary and God's dwelling in 15v17 find their counterpart throughout Psalm 68; the dwelling of God is one of the thematic centres of the Psalm (p57+). The reference to the 'mountain of God's inheritance' in 15v17 forms a link with the central section of Psalm 68: v16-19. The term 'inheritance' also occurs at 68v10.
2. God leads the people he has redeemed in 15v13 just as he goes out before them in 68v8. The way God is depicted as doing this 'in his mercy' at 15v13 (in contradistinction to his

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<sup>143</sup> In addition to the commentaries, a select bibliography of important discussion on Ex 15 would include: B.S. Childs, "A Traditio-Historical Study of the Reed Sea Tradition," *VT* 20 (1970), p410+; F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *JNES* 14 (1955), p237-50; F.M. Cross, "The Song of the Sea" in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1973), p121-144; D.N. Freedman, "Strophe and Metre in Exodus 15," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy – Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p187-227; D.N. Freedman, "The Song of the Sea," *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy – Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p179-186; N. Lohfink, "The Song of Victory at the Red Sea," *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968), p67-86; J. Muilenberg, "A Liturgy of the Triumphs of Yahweh," *Studia Biblica et Semitica T.C. Vriezen Dedicata* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1966), p238-250; H. Strauss, "Das Meerlied des Mose—ein 'Siegeslied' Israels?," *ZAW* 97 (1935), p103-9; W. Wifall, "The Sea of Reeds as Sheol," *ZAW* 92 (1980), p325-32.



stretching out his hand to swallow Pharaoh — notice the parallel between 15v12-13 and 15v16a+16b-17) chimes nicely with God's bountiful provision of rain for his people even when they are weary in 68v10. The 68v10 passage is likewise set in a context which documents God's devastating destructions on his enemies.

3. God consumes the wicked like stubble in his anger in 15v7, he 'blows' on them in 15v10, and the Canaanites melt in 15v15. These images parallel those of God melting and driving away his enemies in 68v2,3.
4. Others hear and are afraid of the deeds of God in 15v14-16, just as in 68v30-32. Yet there is also a contrast to be noted: whereas the list of nations in 15v14,15 includes only her geographical neighbours, those recorded in 68 are of far greater international and symbolic significance. Psalm 68 envisions a wider horizon, a greater stage on which God's plans are to be acted out.<sup>144</sup>
5. Both texts betray a concern for the names of God. Ex 15v2 contains the first occurrence of הוה in the Hebrew Bible, and the term occurs also in 68v19. If the occurrences in the set phrase 'hallelujah' are excepted, this name occurs in only nine other Psalms,<sup>145</sup> and only in three further passages outside the Psalter. The 'name' of God is referred to explicitly in both 68v19 and 15v3. The opening of Ex 15 deliberately appears to use a variety of names for God, a technique witnessed throughout Psalm 68.
6. The prose setting of the Song of the Sea contains an important link with Psalm 68. After the Song the text records how Miriam 'took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dances' (15v20). It seems that this is picked up in the procession language of Psalm 68v26. The 'bringers of tidings' in 68v12 are also female.

These points may be supported by others of a less significant nature. The following points do not uniquely single out Ex 15 and Psalm 68, but they are sufficiently distinctive to corroborate the case already set out. If the two texts are read in tandem, these further connections may be observed.

7. God is defined as the one who saves in 68v20,21 and 15v3.

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<sup>144</sup> Interestingly, the references to Moab and Edom are not taken into Psalm 68, just as the references to Seir and Edom were not taken across in the quotation of Jud 5 in 68v8,9. Furthermore, the reference to Egypt in 68 is not related directly to the content of Ex 15, despite the links between the texts.

<sup>145</sup> Eight, if 102v19 is taken as a variation on the set phrase 'hallelujah'.



8. God's habitation is referred to in 68v6 and 15v13. In 15v13 God leads his people to this habitation, a parallel with the movement of Psalm 68 (cf also 15v2; 68v17).
9. God guides his people 'in strength' in 15v14 and is their 'strength and song' in 15v2. This links with the repetition of **יִצְחָק** in 68v32-35.
10. The many references to the sea in 15 (v1,4,5,8,10 but particularly v19) are balanced by reference to 'the depths of the sea' in 68v23.
11. The violent dashing in pieces of God's enemies in 15v6 chimes with the violent imagery of 68v22,24.
12. The eternal nature of God's reign and dwelling is brought out in both texts: 15v18; 68v17.
13. Verbs of singing and rejoicing are repeated in both texts: 15v1,2,(11),27; 68v5.
14. God's enemies speak of dividing the spoil in 15v9, a plan which subsequently backfires on them (as in Jud 5). In 68v14 it is Israel who divides the spoils (cf 68v19).
15. Pharaoh's chariots in 15v4 contrast with God's in 68v18.

On the basis of the more convincing of the first group of parallels alone it seems fair to see a deliberate relationship between the two texts. Psalm 68 provides an expansion of many of the elements that are present only in outline in Ex 15, creating echoes and reminiscence of the great triumph celebrated in the Exodus text.

## Thematic Movement

The most important connection between Psalm 68 and Ex 15 is the thematic movement they share. Essentially, Psalm 68 is an account of God's journeyings through the wilderness with his people and of his taking up residence in his new temple/sanctuary in Jerusalem.<sup>146</sup> The Psalm pivots around v16-19 in which God's new mountain home on Zion is described. Before this we have allusions to God's previous mountain, mount Sinai, and of his presence among his people as he journeyed and 'rode' with them towards Zion. After it we have an account of the effect of God's arrival at his new abode: Israel joins together in procession and praise, and all the kingdoms of the world submit and come to Zion with tribute. God's triumphs in the past are an assurance of this wonderful future, and interlaced throughout the

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<sup>146</sup> I anticipate later conclusions here; p250-252.

Psalm are vigorous accounts of God's annihilation of his enemies, along with expressions of praise and adulation for both his power and his kind deeds towards his people.

These central themes find their counterpart in Ex 15. Structurally, Ex 15 does not have a central section like 68v16-19; instead it is generally agreed to divide into two parts, v1-12 and v13-18. These two sections are carefully balanced, each containing phrases which correspond with one another.<sup>147</sup> Despite the differing structures of Psalm 68 and Ex 15, the parallel is close. The first part of Ex 15 recounts God's remarkable victory, and celebrates it as a sure indication of both the greatness and the character of God. The second part looks towards the establishment of the sanctuary, God's holy mountain abode (v13,17), presented in the text as if it were future, though virtually all assume it to be written after the event. This is the same movement as in Psalm 68: God's marvellous acts and victories in the past lead on to the bringing of his people to the land, and the establishment of God's holy place upon Zion. The effect of this is identical to that described in Ex 15: nations submit in amazement, turning to worship God as he reigns over them as king. Throughout, both texts are interlaced with accounts of God's destruction of his enemies, and expressions of praise and worship.

The past deeds of God which are celebrated are not identical in the two texts (Ex 15 celebrates a particular victory of God in the drowning of the Egyptians in the Reed Sea; Psalm 68 focusses on Sinai and the wilderness wanderings), but the theological effect and significance of both texts is similar. Both texts take two of the most significant groups of traditions from Israel's history as they are presented in the biblical canon, link them together, and assign them theological significance. Crucial traditions about the Exodus and Sinai recorded in the Pentateuch are integrated with traditions about the Monarchy and temple. Both are assigned significance as part of the seamless working of God through history.

The two texts do this from different perspectives. The Song of the Sea is presented as a text from the period of the Exodus which anticipates or prophesies that, as part of his 'plan,' God's sanctuary will be established on some mountain (as yet only God knows which!).<sup>148</sup> This is seen as the natural consequence of his deliverance of the Israelites at the Reed Sea and their birth as a nation; as a result the whole world will come to recognise and submit to God. Psalm 68 presents itself as a Davidic text, one perhaps from the early period of the Monarchy, which connects the new developments of the ark and temple on Zion with the activities of God in the past including the wilderness journeys. According to Psalm 68, the

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<sup>147</sup> For a convenient summary see B.S. Childs, *Exodus. A Critical, Theological Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster, 1974), p252.

<sup>148</sup> It is possible to take the mountain of Ex 15 as Sinai.



establishment of the sanctuary on Zion is the natural and expected result of God's deliverance of Israel from their enemies and of his leading them from Sinai through the wilderness. Both texts thus aim to present a coherent and unified view of Israelite history and also a vision of the future which this must precipitate, a world in which all nations, with Israel at their head, will submit to God's rule and worship him. The texts do this by making theological claims about God, and by emphasising the continuity and logic of God's activities throughout the history they present. Both texts give theological shape to history and to the future.

Most readers of these texts would probably be more willing to accept their apparent relative dating than would historical-critical scholars. By this I mean that most readers would probably accept Ex 15 as an earlier story/myth/event than the story of the construction of the temple. Even if they do not think Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea or that Ex 15 was immediately composed afterwards by Moses, they are probably more willing to accept the Exodus story as an early myth, and Ex 15 as an early song to celebrate it (rather than a late song pretending to be an early celebration of it). They may be more willing to accept that this really was the way Israelites viewed their history from ancient times: as a continuous and integrated story. Our two texts themselves make an important contribution in promoting this view, and it would not seem to be a coincidence that one is so full of allusions to the other. Part of the power of Psalm 68 is that its view of history can be tied in and equated with the view of that other text, apparently so ancient, Ex 15. Perhaps the Psalm implicitly claims to be the fulfillment of Ex 15, the two texts dealing with the same issue from different ends and meeting in the middle? Not only so, but the two texts confirm in broad outline the view of history that one gets when one reads the canonical Hebrew Bible text at face-value: that there is some kind of sensible movement in God's activities in Israel's history: that the focus on Exodus/Sinai and on the temple and the Davidic/Solomonic period is a logical one, and that the two may be connected in a meaningful way. Psalm 68 and Ex 15 claim that they can, that one is the logical extension or development of the other. These two texts provide us with a framework for constructing a story of Israelite history, and they do so even more strongly when they are seen in the light of one another.

The question that now arises is what is to be made of these claims? Is this view of Israelite history an illusion which Psalm 68 and the compilers of the canon have cleverly created, pulling the wool over the eyes of the average reader by connecting what were originally quite unrelated traditions — or does the view of Israelite history Psalm 68 and Ex 15 provide represent a much more ancient view? How significant is the theological and historical bridge



that both texts attempt to build, and what does it *really* tell us about the religious and historical traditions of Israel in the early Monarchy and before? One can only attempt to answer these questions in any depth when one has a view of the date and provenance of Ex 15. If Ex 15 is very late (say post-exilic), then the parallel between the two is not particularly interesting since the linking up of Israelite history within the space of a unified text which I have highlighted as the significant point of comparison between Ex 15 and Psalm 68 is no older than the formation of the various narrative traditions in something like their present form within the biblical corpus. If, on the other hand, Ex 15 is early, earlier than the connecting up of wilderness and monarchical traditions in the Deuteronomic history, for instance, then the parallel becomes much more important. It would mean that there was an at least partially unified and theological view of Israelite history in earlier times.

### The Dating and Unity of the Song of the Sea

Considerable disagreement has surrounded the dating of Ex 15, with scholars placing the text anywhere from shortly after the supposed date of the Exodus itself (say, the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE), up until the post-Exilic period. I shall explore criteria for dating Hebrew poetry at length in chapter 7.1; that discussion will be presumed here.

The two most significant bodies of work on the dating of the Song of the Sea are those of Cross and Freedman in the Albright school,<sup>149</sup> and Robertson's dissertation *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*.<sup>150</sup> Both agree that there is significant evidence for assigning an early date to Ex 15, with Cross and Freedman opting for the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Even if certain pieces of their evidence are unconvincing, a considerable case still remains to be answered. According to Robertson's work, if any poem in the Hebrew Bible is to be dated early, then first in the list of candidates must come Ex 15.

In contrast, linguistic arguments for a late date (whether late Monarchy through post-Exilic) are unconvincing. Instead, the principal arguments against the early dating come from the content of the text. How could it refer to God's holy mountain and dwelling place, language connected with Zion traditions, before the establishment of the Monarchy and the attempted centralisation of worship in Jerusalem?<sup>151</sup> Such an argument, if it be accepted, pushes the date back at least to the early Monarchy. But the situation becomes much more complicated

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<sup>149</sup> F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam"; F.M. Cross, "The Song of the Sea"; D.N. Freedman, "Strophe and Metre in Exodus 15"; "The Song of the Sea".

<sup>150</sup> D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (SBLDS 3; Missoula MT: Scholars, 1972).

<sup>151</sup> But compare earlier comment that the reference may be to Sinai, not Zion (p152).

than this. If the increasingly widespread doubt concerning the historicity of the biblical accounts of the Monarchy be maintained and if, further, the linking up of Sinai and Zion traditions and the creation of the Yahwistic and Deuteronomistic histories be regarded as late (perhaps post-Exilic, as is now often claimed), then the content of Ex 15 in twinning these themes must be late too (late-monarchical or post-Exilic), since such a harmonistic view of Sinai/Exodus and Zion traditions had to exist in order for Ex 15 to be written. If the 'history of Israel' as the Hebrew Bible presents it (in terms of Exodus—sea-crossing—wilderness—Sinai—conquest—Davidic Monarchy—Zion—temple) had not yet been 'constructed' or 'invented,' then Ex 15 in its present form could not yet exist.

If Ex 15 is assumed to be late on these grounds, what is to be made of the linguistic evidence? One would have to either:

- a) deny it
- b) claim that its archaic style has been fabricated in order to give the appearance of age
- c) move from the concept of absolute dating to relative dating, claiming that although Ex 15 is 'late,' it is earlier than most other OT texts we possess which are even 'later'
- d) deny the unity of the text in its present form, editing out the problematic 'later' content, and assuming the 'original' poem to be early.

The first of the options a-d just presented is unlikely to be appropriate; the linguistic difference between Ex 15 and other texts must be accounted for, and the best way to do this is by the assumption that the text is old, an assumption which chimes with the text's own claims for itself. The second option is likewise unattractive, though it is possible — just. Robertson's study paid particular attention to distinguishing between truly archaic and fake archaic poetry, and concluded that the Song of the Sea was conclusively in the former category; from a linguistic point of view, there was no evidence of archaizing tendencies.

Options c) and d) have more to commend them. Taking option c) first, at the present time an increasing number of scholars are assigning later and later dates to many Hebrew Bible materials. This view may be accompanied by the claim that Ancient Israel as revealed in the Hebrew Bible is largely a fictional, ideological construct, 'invented' in many of its significant elements in the Exilic and post-Exilic periods. Traditional assumptions about the dating of central Hebrew Bible texts are very far from being 'assured results'; any absolute dates which may be proposed would command little scholarly consensus. Traditionally, poetic texts would have been dated with reference to the supposed 'absolute' dates of incidents portrayed in the biblical text or with reference to the supposed dates of the texts which portrayed them.



This is no longer possible without pre-selecting a particular theoretical framework for the composition and dating of the sources of the Hebrew Bible. Such a choice is a perilous one and beyond the scope of this study.

This leaves open the possibility of relative dating, however. Under the assumption that Ex 15 is predominantly a unity, the notion of relative dating enables us to determine a latest possible date for the Song of the Sea. If we date the Yahwistic and Deuteronomistic histories as late as possible (in the post-Exilic period), then we must still date Ex 15 significantly earlier, in order to account for its archaic linguistic features. This takes us back at least to the late Monarchy. At this point we can compare the prophetic writings which originated from that period. These provide one of the surest sources of absolute dating that can be found within the Hebrew Bible corpus. Since Ex 15 is manifestly more archaic than the vast majority of prophetic texts,<sup>152</sup> this places the dating of Ex 15 no later than the early Monarchy. Since we have few texts that can be dated from that period with certainty we cannot necessarily assert a date which is earlier than this.

Of itself, this is a valuable result. For it shows that the traditions of God's conquest over the Egyptians at the sea were linked with traditions about God's holy mountain and dwelling place as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> or even 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. And it does so quite independently of what is made of the Deuteronomistic history and of the historicity of the accounts of the ark narrative and the Davidic and Solomonic narratives of Samuel and Kings.

One of the assumptions on which this conclusion rests is a big one, however: the essential unity of the Song of the Sea. An investigation of this assumption brings us to the fourth option for reconciling the evidence of the archaic language of the Song with the supposed much 'later' traditions of Zion: that Ex 15 is an archaic text, but one which originally contained no references to the conquest of the land and the establishment of a holy mountain dwelling of God. On this view (which leaves open the possibility of a much earlier dating of the poem, say 13<sup>th</sup> century, after Cross and Freedman), these later traditions will have been edited into the Song at a much later date.

Ultimately this is an undecidable issue. All we can do is ask whether the poem looks as though it has been edited, or whether it looks like a unity. Even if it looks like a unity, one can still claim that this is nothing more than a testimony to the fact that the editors did a good job of incorporating the new traditions. It is important to notice the weakness in such an argument, however. It is an argument which is incapable of falsification. The text comes to us



as a unity, and any proposal that it is not must satisfy two criteria: first, it must show that the text shows signs of unevenness, additions and other editorial work; second, it must demonstrate that part of the text cannot satisfactorily be assigned an early date, and that another part of the text cannot satisfactorily be assigned a later date.

In the case of Ex 15, I am not aware of any linguistic evidence which can be brought to bear to differentiate different parts of the text. This leaves us with content. The core of the text concerning the destruction of Pharaoh in the sea is best understood as an ancient tradition (whether committed to writing in a relatively early or late period). The question is whether this early stratum is incompatible with the concept of the conquest of the land and God's mountain dwelling in v13,17. It is these verses with their reference to a mountain sanctuary of God which lead to the assumption of later additions, and since the sea is not referred to in v13-18, and since v13-18 do not function very successfully without v13,17, the most plausible form of this hypothesis is that v13-18 as a whole are a later addition, modelled to lie in tandem with the earlier section, v1-12.<sup>153</sup>

This proposal is a reasonable one. Nevertheless, I would question whether the content of v13,17 is sufficient basis for disengaging v13-18 from the parent text. To me it seems quite plausible that even a pre-monarchical text may contain references to God's plan to dwell in a mountain sanctuary. After all, such a concept was hardly new to the surrounding cultures: many gods were thought to have or aspire after such a mountain abode; the sanctuary does not have to be established on Zion for such words to be written, for they betray no great leap of theological imagination on an author's part. A writer may well have believed or hoped that God would establish a 'holy place' upon a mountain at some point in the future. If this point be accepted then the need to splice up the text or to assign it a late date is eliminated. I do not wish to argue for a pre-Monarchy dating here, but I do wish to point out that such a date is not impossible, and a date no later than early-mid Monarchy for Exodus 15 seems likely. Even if the composite origin of Ex 15 be accepted, I see no major reasons to date v13-18 later than this.

There is another factor which supports the argument for an earlier date and the unity of Ex 15: the apparent conservatism with which poetic texts in narrative contexts appear to have been preserved and the consequent unlikelihood of major editorial additions and rewriting. The most logical reason why these texts were inserted into their narrative contexts in the first

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<sup>152</sup> As per Cross, Freedman and Robertson once again.

<sup>153</sup> The reference to God's habitation in v2 may also be regarded as an addition which chimes with the material to be added in the second half. I see no reason for the statement not to be original, however.

place was because they were highly valued and because they were regarded as ancient. There seems to have been a conservatism in their preservation, a reluctance to change material even to the point of including passages which are monumentally obscure or even incomprehensible — because of the esteem in which they were held as part of the ancient tradition. In such a climate it seems unlikely that editors would craft a composite text unifying different traditions but leaving such obscurities for the reader. It is simpler to assume the antiquity of texts such as Jud 5, Ex 15, Gen 49.

In sum, Ex 15 is a relatively early text: early-mid Monarchy at the latest, and quite probably earlier, certainly in parts. A valid case can be made for regarding v13-19 as a later harmonising addition, but this is probably still relatively early, and the case for fragmenting the text is not as strong as is often claimed.

### Implications

It makes little difference to the interpretation of Psalm 68 whether it or Ex 15 is regarded as the earlier text, although the linguistic evidence and Psalm 68's allusive techniques more generally would favour the priority of Ex 15. Anticipating later discussion, both texts either originate from early-mid Monarchy, or else Psalm 68 does and Ex 15 is still earlier (I favour this latter alternative). Working on these assumptions, Psalm 68 connects with Ex 15 for similar reasons to those for which it connects with Jud 5 and Numbers 10: to establish continuity with tradition and to authorise what is now being said, to rework evocative language and make it contemporary.

Ex 15 (claiming of itself to be a text from the time of the Exodus, and historically accepted as such by most readers) provides a fruitful context against which to read Psalm 68. The theological claims of Psalm 68 concerning God's activity and purpose in history come out all the more clearly when one reads it in this light. Once the thematic parallel has been spotted, and once the language of the Psalm with all its allusions to the Song of the Sea has begun to work its effect, the Psalm's note of triumph strikes that bit louder and its theological message hits home with that much more clarity. The celebration of the present and the vision of the future, already vivid in the Psalm, become etched more forcibly once the exciting connections with the past are drawn in the mind of the reader. It is the use of allusion and echo in the Psalm that enables such a process to take place.

More specifically, it is possible to read Psalm 68 as the claimed fulfilment of the vision of the future Moses had in Ex 15. God had destroyed Pharaoh, and now he would lead his people to



his mountain sanctuary where he would dwell among them. Psalm 68 takes up the story where the 'historical' part of Ex 15 left off: with the journey through the wilderness, the arrival in the land and the conquest of it, and the erection of God's sanctuary and temple in Zion. But just like Ex 15 which has now been fulfilled (so Psalm 68 seems to claim), the new text also contains an as yet unfulfilled part: its vision of the subjection of all nations to God and to Israel, and God's reign over them all. Both texts have this dimension of past celebration, present reality, and future vision. The connections between them, and the theological view of history and the bridging of traditions which they share, are of great importance.

### ***Other Texts with Strong Parallels to Psalm 68***

There are a number of other texts in the Hebrew Bible which, while not as closely linked as the texts already considered, nevertheless show significant similarities to Psalm 68. Most of these are poetic texts set within contexts of either narrative or prophetic material. I deal here with Deut 33, Hab 3 and Ps 18.

#### **Deuteronomy 33**

Deut 33<sup>154</sup> is presented by the Hebrew Bible as an archaic text: it is allegedly the blessing of Moses himself on the twelve tribes, after the manner of Jacob's blessing in Gen 49. There are also independent linguistic arguments for assuming it to be archaic, although these are far from gaining universal acceptance.<sup>155</sup>

The text begins with an account of God's coming from Sinai (compare Psalm 68v9, amended by many to an identical wording with Deut 33; see Notes), and his rising up (קום, as Psalm 68v2) from Seir. He shines forth from Mount Paran, and comes with 'ten thousands of holy ones' (a close parallel to 68v18; compare also the repetition of שָׁקֵד in Psalm 68). This opening verse of Moses' blessing thus contains three substantial parallels to Psalm 68.

There are two significant points to be made. The first is that despite the parallels, Psalm 68 does not mention Seir or Paran — only Sinai. A similar removal of references to Seir and Edom was noted in the quotation of Jud 5 in Psalm 68; perhaps this is sufficient evidence to

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<sup>154</sup> For pertinent bibliography on Deut 33, see, in addition to the commentaries: A. Caquot, "Les bénédictions de Moïse", *Semitica* 32 (1982), p67-81; D.L. Christensen, "Two Stanzas of a Hymn in Deuteronomy 33", *Biblica* 65 (1984), p382-89; F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, "The Blessing of Moses", *JBL* 67 (1948), p191-210. Compare also C.J. Labuschagne, *OTS* 19 (1974), p97-112; H. Seebass, *VT* 27 (1977), p158-69.

<sup>155</sup> See D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, p138.



suggest that the tradition of God coming from Edom alluded to in texts like Jud 5 and Deut 33 was removed in Psalm 68.<sup>156</sup> Psalm 68, in linking Sinai and wilderness traditions to the Monarchy and sanctuary in Zion, only needed to borrow Sinai references, not references to Edom. Indeed, references to Edom and Seir were potentially confusing since the main Pentateuchal accounts of the wilderness journey shows Israel and the ark skirting round Edom to avoid confrontation rather than God coming from there in a triumphal march. In this sense it would almost have been an embarrassment to borrow the Edom references and so they are quietly omitted from Psalm 68.

The motif of God's marching from the south noted already in Deut 33 and Jud 5 is found in a number of other texts. One is Hab 3, discussed below, and another Isa 63v1-4, in which God comes with dyed garments from Bozrah, his garments drenched in the blood of battle (perhaps there is an echo of the language of Psalm 68 here).<sup>157</sup> However, since Psalm 68 does not refer to Edom there is no need to discuss this text here.

The second point of interest arising from Psalm 68's connections with Deut 33v2 is that 33v2 mentions the 'fiery law' (KJV for qere  $\Pi\tau$   $\Psi\aleph$ ) which God had in his right hand. This is followed by further references to law in v3-4. Perhaps there is here an explanation of the fact that Psalm 68 was linked so strongly with the giving of the law in later Jewish interpretation. v16-19 is taken by the Targum and other Jewish writings to refer not to God's ascent and conquest of his mountain, but to Moses' ascent of Sinai to receive the law. Once the links between Psalm 68 and Deut 33 have been spotted it would not be an unnatural exegetical step to try to interpret the one text in relation to the other: if Deut 33 was about the giving of the law to Israel, perhaps another complex text with parallels to it must also be. This may indicate how an important interpretative tradition for Psalm 68 was born.

The parallels with Deut 33 have not yet been exhausted. The opening section (v1-5) also refers to the gathering of the heads and tribes of Israel (v5), a link with the procession of tribes and princes in 68v28 (compare the use of the term 'congregation' in 68v27 and 33v4). Other parallels are to be found in the concluding section of Moses' blessing:

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<sup>156</sup> This assumes the frame of Deut 33 to be earlier than Psalm 68.

<sup>157</sup> C. Westerman, *Isaiah 40-66 (OTL)*; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969; orig. German 1966), p380-384, rightly points out that what is truly distinctive in this passage is the emphasis that God accomplished the victory against the nations *entirely alone*. We are led into an apparently everyday scene (a sentinel checking the identity of one who approaches), only to be awoken by the uniqueness of this being. He has accomplished single-handedly a work that would normally take an entire army. Westerman sees this as an echo of the mythical language of a god's personal blood-stained victory over chaos monsters (such as Marduk's victory over Tiamat).

1. God is depicted as he 'who rides upon the heaven to help you, and in his excellency on the sky' (v28). This is parallel to 68v5,34.
2. God thrusts out the enemy and destroys them in 33v27. This process is captured graphically at a number of points throughout Psalm 68.
3. The fountain of Jacob is referred to in 33v28; this is picked up in 68v27 in which Israel is substituted for Jacob.
4. God's treading upon the high places in 33v29 is developed in God's choice of mountain in Psalm 68 and in the depictions of his destruction of his enemies and the dipping of the feet in blood.

It appears that Psalm 68 has deliberately borrowed the phraseology and imagery of Deut 33 at a number of points. As with the previous texts we have examined, the phenomenon is best accounted for as a literary technique in which Psalm 68 borrows evocative language from earlier texts to utilise and rework in a new setting — establishing a connection with the past, but using those memories in a new setting. From the point of view of the composition of Deut 33, it is instructive that each of the parallels suggested above occurs within the frame of the blessing on the tribes, not in the record of the blessing itself (that is, in v2-5 and v26-29, not v6-25). This frame is generally considered to be secondary.

### Habakkuk 3

Hab 3<sup>158</sup> furnishes further pertinent parallels to Psalm 68, many of which coincide with links that have already been put forward with Deut 33. First, God comes from the south. The fundamental parallel here is between Hab 3 and Deut 33 (given the reference to Teman and Paran), but the use of *selah* following the opening statement of God's coming, and the ensuing description of the implications of this coming is closely parallel to the use of *selah* in God's entrance from the south in Psalm 68v8-9 and Jud 5. Some of the more suggestive connections which may be drawn are as follows:

1. Both texts use procession imagery, although in quite different ways (3v5; 68v8,25-28)
2. Nations and mountains are scattered, mountains tremble, and the deep is afraid (3v6,10; 68v17,18,23 etc)

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<sup>158</sup> In addition to the commentaries, pertinent bibliography on Hab 3 includes: W.F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk" in H.H. Rowley (ed.), *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (T.H. Robinson FS; Edinburgh, 1950), p1-18; J.H. Eaton, "The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3," *ZAW* 76 (1964), p144-171; T. Hiebert, "The Use of Inclusion in Habakkuk 3," in E.R. Follis (ed.), *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTS 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p119-140; B. Margulis, "The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation," *ZAW* 82 (1970), p409-41.



3. Both texts refer to God's riding and his chariots (3v8,15; 68v5,18,34)
4. The tribes are referred to (3v9; 68v27-28)
5. God marches through the earth (3v12; 68v8)
6. God goes forth for the salvation of his people (3v13; 68v8,20-21,25)
7. God wounds (יחמ/יחמ) the head of the wicked (3v13,14; 68v21)
8. The references to Cushan and Cush could conceivably be linked (3v7; 68v32)

The relationship between Psalm 68 and Hab 3 can only be discussed once an understanding of the nature and purpose of Hab 3 within the prophecy of Habakkuk has been established.

Hab 3 reads most naturally as an account of Habakkuk's visionary or ecstatic experience of God (compare the first person pronouns in v7,16), coupled with his personal response *in the light of this vision* to his own situation as depicted in chs 1,2.<sup>159</sup> This vision is recounted in the terms of earlier texts in which the prophet was presumably steeped.

An alternative is to understand the theophanic description as a more cold-blooded literary creation of Habakkuk<sup>160</sup> rather than as an ecstatic experience. Such an account would serve either of two goals, and probably both. First, it would function as propaganda reminding listeners/readers of the identity and power of the God they were supposed to trust in. This would unite them and give them strength in the light of the historical crisis which they faced, a crisis depicted by the prophet in chs 1,2.<sup>161</sup> Second, the Psalm would function theologically as a prayer to God, encouraging him to mobilise himself on behalf of his people.<sup>162</sup> This process is witnessed many times in the lament Psalms (74,77,89 etc): the Psalmist recalls the past deeds of God, whether in their own right or (especially) on behalf of his people, and uses these as a fulcrum on which to lever God into action once more. In the case of Hab 3, the prophet, in recounting God's power and splendour and by recalling his victories of the past, interlacing his account with mythic language of divine conquest, in effect challenges God to

<sup>159</sup> On the close relationship of Hab 3 to the preceding chapters see R.L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco: Word, 1984), p94-96,115-117; C.A.-. Keller, "Die Eigenart des Propheten Habakuks," *ZAW* 85 (1973), p156-67; D.E. Gowan, *The Triumph of Faith in Habakkuk* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1976).

<sup>160</sup> I use the label 'Habakkuk' to refer to the implied author of the book which bears this name. I have no reason to suppose it was someone else other than he, though this in no way affects the discussion.

<sup>161</sup> The way the prophecy as a whole achieves this effect shows a clever use of rhetorical technique. The prophet himself, by expressing doubt and fear as he does in the first two chapters, functions as a representative of the people. He is one of them, suffering the same weakness and crisis of faith as they. From this standpoint he is more powerfully able to exhort them, saying, in effect, 'I've been there too, but (with the help of *this* understanding of God, *this* revelation, and *these* memories of past glories) I've learned that God is in control. I may be scared, but I have confidence in him.'

<sup>162</sup> This endeavour to mobilise God into intervention through prayer and song is dealt with helpfully by Walter Brueggemann. Two useful treatments are: *The Message of the Psalms – A Theological*



show that he really is the sort of God that has been claimed, and that he is worthy of the esteem in which he has been held. The Psalm probably fulfils both these functions: for a community which has or can be encouraged to have such a concept of God as Hab 3v3-15 entails, the theophanic description encourages them to allow such a belief to offset present suffering, and it also functions as effective prayer and petition.

Either way, the theophany account is cast in language which deliberately recalls the traditional songs of Israel (Deut 33, Jud 5; perhaps Psalm 18). Like them it contains echoes of mythic conflict, but it also contains elements which are almost universally regarded as later developments. Hab 3 utilises and reworks earlier language in a similar manner to that proposed for Psalm 68. Both texts are manifestations of a similar phenomenon, even though they are reworking texts for different purposes. Psalm 68 and Hab 3 are thus not to be compared directly with one another, but rather seen as different examples of a similar technique. They are both texts which have arisen from and build upon similar ancient traditions and which appear to be closely linked to the same ancient texts.

This conclusion about Hab 3 is important, for it corroborates what I have been arguing about Psalm 68's use of pre-existing material. Hab 3 as a whole functions differently from Jud 5 and Ex 15, both paradigmatic 'early' songs as they are, since it is not predominantly a celebration of the past. The focus of the text in Habakkuk as a whole is the present threat of invasion and captivity and the concept of waiting faithfully for future retribution and vindication from God which is to come. It is because of these topics that the past acts of God and the traditional language and imagery used to describe him are employed. The language of Hab 3 can only function in this way if such a body of traditional language exists. It is no use evoking traditional memories of God in order to provide comfort, a theology, and a world-view, if no one has memories of that kind. Hab 3 can only 'work' if Jud 5, Ex 15 and other texts like them exist.<sup>163</sup> Hab 3 takes the listener/reader into the triumphant thought-world of Jud 5 and Ex 15, and uses those associations to achieve its rhetorical effect.<sup>164</sup> This argument supports the independent evidence of archaic linguistic features within texts like Jud 5 — there is strong reason to date these texts early and to see later texts like Hab 3 and Psalm 68

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*Commentary* (Augsburg OT Studies; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. P.D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

<sup>163</sup> No doubt other texts are reworked in these later texts also — texts which we no longer possess.

<sup>164</sup> By contrast, it is very difficult to determine what the rhetorical effect would be if Hab 3 and other texts were the 'originals' and Ex 15 and Jud 5 (for instance) were composed later. To invert the order of composition in this manner necessitates a much more complex and problematic theory.

to be utilising them. Psalm 68 likewise fails to work effectively if the other texts to which it is related did not exist when it was composed; it has no currency in which to trade.

## Psalm 18 / 2 Samuel 22

Although Psalm 68 does not describe a theophany in any detail, several distinctive elements of theophanic language are used, and a comparison with other theophanic texts is fruitful.<sup>165</sup> For this purpose I shall compare Psalm 18 (= 2 Sam 22), a text judged to be early by a number of scholars. Many of the texts discussed already include theophanic elements (Jud 5, Ex 15; Deut 33; Hab 3), but Psalm 18 forms a useful comparison because its description of a theophany is so comprehensive.

The theophany in 18v8-18 originates from the Psalmist's plight and cry for help in v5-7. The cry ascends to God's temple and comes before him, whereupon the earth shakes and trembles (v8) and God is made manifest. The points of comparison with Psalm 68 are as follows:

1. The earth shakes and trembles (18v8; 68v9)
2. God rides upon 'a cherub' and upon 'the wings of the wind' (18v11; 68v5,34)
3. Reference is made to dark waters and thick clouds of the skies (18v12; 68v9,23,35)
4. God thunders in the heavens and gives his voice (18v13; 68v34)
5. Enemies are scattered (18v14; 68v2-3)
6. God rebukes (18v16; 68v31) and delivers (18v18; 68v20,21)

Many of these features are quite commonly associated with theophany and have already been noted in the other texts I have examined (earthquake, thunder, scattering, God's voice). The motif of God riding is thus the most powerful link between the two texts, although even this is found elsewhere. I suggest therefore that this comparison illustrates that Psalm 68 is to some extent indebted to the language of theophanic texts, but that there is not a close or deliberate relationship between Psalms 18 and 68. The theophany of Psalm 18 is in many ways paradigmatic of biblical theophanies since it brings together in one place most of the

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<sup>165</sup> Bibliography on theophany includes: J. Jeremias, *Theophanie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965); J.J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995); S.L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).



motifs associated with theophany in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>166</sup> The comparison enables one to see that some of the language of Psalm 68 is related to theophany, but that this is not one of its major interests. Psalm 68 outlines theophanic features in the briefest of snapshots and even begins to describe one in v8-9 — but a detailed description is absent even though it might so easily and naturally have been included. Psalm 68 is more concerned with the theme of God's *presence* rather than describing it, more interested in God's *march* through the wilderness with his people and his *ascent* to his mountain sanctuary than with a description of any one particular appearance of God in theophanic splendour.

## Links with Isaiah

Links with deutero- and trito-Isaiah have been suggested by a number of scholars, including such eminent figures as Battenwieser, Gunkel, Ewald and Hupfeld.<sup>167</sup> A few of the points that might be included are as follows (Psalm 68 order):<sup>168</sup>

Psalm 68	Phrase	Isaiah
v4*	cast up a highway	Is 40v3; 57v14; 62v10 (nowhere else in this sense)
v6	bring out prisoners	42v7; 49v9; 61v1
v31etc	empires submitting to God	45v14
v26-29	procession description	40v9; 52v7
v6	bringing home	58v7
v7-10	God leads and cares for people	35; 41v17+; 43v16+
v23	festal procession	35v10; 51v11; 52v1,8+
v24	nations watching	40v5; 35v2; 52v10
v29	Egypt and Cush	43v3; 45v14; 40v5

I concur with Perowne's evaluation that most of these apparent parallels are not particularly close.<sup>169</sup> The links with Jud 5 and some of the other texts examined above are much more

<sup>166</sup> In the Psalms, other examples might have included 50v2-3; 69v1,2; 77v16-19; 97v3-5. These texts, along with Ps 18, Hab 3 and Jud 5, are all listed by R.L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco: Word, 1984), p115 as theophanies 'of the Sinai type.'

<sup>167</sup> M. Battenwieser, *The Psalms: Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p263,264 provides a comprehensive list; see also A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Book of Psalms*, 1 vol. ed. (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*; Cambridge: CUP, 1906; orig. 1902), p376; H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Van den Hoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), p286,287; G.H.A. Ewald, *Commentary on the Psalms* (London: 1880,1881); H. Hupfeld, *Die Psalmen* (Gotha, 1855-62).

<sup>168</sup> For a more comprehensive list, see for example, M. Battenwieser, *Psalms*, p263-4.



significant. An important factor in this conclusion is that 2-3 Isaiah is an extremely long body of text in comparison to the other texts considered. The percentage chances of finding parallels between any chapter-length text and another text 26 chapters long is much higher than finding parallels between two texts of only a chapter-length each. The parallels with Isaiah would have to be *far* more extensive than those with the previous texts considered (which they are not) for the relationship between Psalm 68 and 2-3 Isaiah to be considered on an equal footing. Furthermore, there are numerous links between the Psalter as a whole and 2-3 Isaiah; it is doubtful whether the results for Psalm 68 are substantially more numerous than those that could be produced for many other Psalms. This would not be true of the parallels between Psalm 68 and the non-Isaiah texts already considered above.

There can be no doubt that the language of 2-3 Isaiah is closely related to the language and imagery of many Psalms. Psalm 68 is a part of this picture — a significant part, but only a part nevertheless. It may be that some of the Psalms arose from the same scribal groups as 2-3 Isaiah, or it may be that the writers of 2-3 Isaiah are steeped in the language of pre-existing Psalms collections. In my view there is sufficient evidence for the antiquity of Psalm 68 to assume that it was a part of such a collection and may have been known by and influential to Deutero- and Trito- Isaiah.

### Further Inner-Biblical Possibilities

Almost every part of Psalm 68 could be cross-referenced to other biblical passages, with the result of this chapter degenerating into nothing more than a catalogue of marginal references. There are many other individual texts which cast light on this or that verse of Psalm 68 but since these illuminate only isolated verses of Psalm 68 and are thus not a source of more large-scale borrowing, discussion has been confined to the Notes. What I have tried to do is look at texts which are either explicitly quoted in Psalm 68 (Num 10; Jud 5), or which evince such a number of parallels such that one text might help to illuminate the other (Jud 5 again; Ex 15; Deut 33). I have also examined two further texts, one which uses a comparable intertextual technique (Hab 3), and another (Psalm 18) to show that while Psalm 68 uses theophanic language, theophany is of itself not one of the main concerns of the Psalm. Psalm 68's use of the ancient texts considered here has cast light on its thematic concerns and its literary technique of reworking earlier materials to authenticate and emphasise its message.

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<sup>169</sup> J.J.S. Perowne, *Book of Psalms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol.1 (London: Bell & Daldy, 1870), p500. A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p376, also refers to alleged links between Psalm 68 and Isa 24-27, concluding that these 'certainly cannot be proved'.

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### 3.3. Allusion to Episodes of Biblical ‘History’

I want now to look for allusions to ‘events’ of the Hebrew Bible within Psalm 68. By placing the words ‘event’ and ‘history’ in single quotation marks I intend to bypass discussion of whether and in what form such events actually happened. Questions of historicity in the biblical narratives are not my concern here; instead I am examining parallels between Psalm 68 and biblical ‘history’ irrespective of whether that ‘history’ is a literary construct or is close to what ‘actually happened’. This investigation will have value in showing to what extent Psalm 68 fits within the traditions recorded within the Hebrew Bible corpus. It will ultimately lead to an interpretation of the Psalm and the uncovering of some possible original settings. I make no attempt to differentiate streams of tradition or to get back to some proposed underlying historical reality. Having made this clear, I now dispense with the quotation marks around the word ‘history’.

#### *Biblical Episodes*

The material is best presented by repeating the text of the Psalm in translation and including annotations which suggest possible historical allusions. In the first instance I am not asking what events *are* alluded to in Psalm 68 (as though one could have access to such knowledge!); my goal is instead much more weighted towards *trying to find* potential allusions wherever possible. It is a maximising reading, choosing to include rather than exclude suggestions if there is any doubt. I include some points already dealt with in the poetic texts considered, since they are so central to the overall picture of historical allusion in Psalm 68. The whole text is included to illustrate proportionally in which parts of Psalm 68 the majority of the allusions lie.

- 2        God arises; his enemies are scattered  
          And those who hate him flee before him.
- 3        As smoke is driven away you drive them,  
          As wax melts before fire  
          So the wicked perish before God.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> v2-3 would read well in the light of the Exodus, wilderness traditions and conquest, the rejoicing of v4-5 fitting that context admirably. However, the language and imagery of these verses is so general and so typical of the Psalms that although such a reading provides a good context for the verses, it cannot be construed as an allusion.



*Such words might aptly describe the conquest, though of course no such reference need be assumed. If the two texts are placed together then Psalm 68 is illuminated.*

4 But the righteous rejoice and exult before God  
And are glad in rejoicing.

5 Sing to God! Sing to his name!

Extol the rider through the desert

*God's journey through the wilderness both before and after the construction of the tabernacle (the angel of his presence, the pillar of cloud and fire, the presence of God upon the ark travelling before the Israelites).<sup>171</sup>*

Whose name is Yah, and exult before him!

*Canonically speaking, Yah is first used on exit from Egypt in Ex 15.*

6 Father of the fatherless and judge of widows

*Concern for the widow and fatherless in the law of Moses*

Is God in his holy dwelling.

*God's presence among his people in the tabernacle, enthroned above the ark. The use of the term 'sanctuary' in Ex 25+.*

7 God sets the solitary in houses,

*The midwives of Ex 1 (they feared the Lord, and he made them houses).*

Brings out prisoners into prosperity —

*The Exodus from slavery in Egypt; so Midrash.*

But the rebellious dwell in parched land.

*The rebellious Israelites punished by God and condemned to die in the wilderness?*

*The rebellious nations driven out in the conquest?*

8 O God, when you went forth before your people,

*Evocative language about God's march from the south to conquer the land; Midrash compares the pillar of cloud in which God went before them (Ex 13v21).*

When you marched through Jeshimon

*selah*

*Clear allusion to journey through wilderness. The term Jeshimon is used extensively in Numbers of the wilderness wanderings.*

9 The earth trembled; yea, the heavens gushed forth

*The conquest of Jericho, destruction of Sisera, and other battles of the conquest in which God used natural and supernatural phenomena to defeat his enemies? More likely, however, is a reference to God's theophany on Sinai (Ex 19).*

Before God, the One of Sinai,

*Explicit mention of Sinai, reinforcing the preceding suggestion: the theophany on Sinai is described in these verses.*

Before God, the God of Israel.

*The covenant at Sinai was the point at which God became specifically 'the God of Israel.' It seems significant that God is referred to as such at this point in the Psalm, and in conjunction with the term 'Sinai' in the previous verse.*

10 You caused a bountiful rain to fall, O God.

*The rain of quails and manna (cf Ps 78v24 'he rained down upon them manna to eat')? God's provision of water? (although this did not include rain specifically).*

You strengthened your inheritance —

Even when it was weary.

*God's provision of water in the wilderness when the Israelites were desperate? This does not fit too comfortably, however, since God never sated them with rain. An alternative is to think of his fertilisation of the land by giving rain (Deut 28v12), although this fails to find an explicit occasion in the Hebrew Bible with which to parallel the verse.*

11 Your flock dwells there;

*The occupation of the land.*

In your goodness you prepared for the poor, O God.

*God's provision for the poor and disadvantaged in the law of Moses. His provision for Israel, though a small and weak nation (compare Ex 16v3-6; Deut 7v7).*

12 The Lord gives the command —

Those who bring tidings are a great host.

*An apt evocation of the immediacy and decisiveness of God's victories during the conquest and beyond.*

13 Kings of hosts flee, they flee!

*Destruction of Sisera as a type of Israel's power to inherit and retain the land promised by God.*

And the beauty of the house will divide the spoil.

14 Though you remain between the saddlebags

*Compare the rebuke of Jud 5v15-17, but also the customary involvement of Israelite women in the celebration of victorious battles (2 Sam 18v6, Jephthah's daughter, Ex 15, Deborah herself).*

The wings of the dove are covered with silver

And her pinions with green gold.

15 When the Almighty scatters kings there

It snows on Zalmon.

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<sup>171</sup> G.H.A. Ewald, *Commentary*, and H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, p284, saw a reference to the Exodus here, but this is denied by B.D. Eerdmans, *The Hebrew Book of Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 1947), p326.

*The scattering of the kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og? These victories are mentioned more than once (Ps 135v11+; 136v17+; Deut 2v24+; 3v1+; Num 21v21+; 32+).*

16 A mountain of God is mount Bashan

A many-peaked mountain is mount Bashan.

*Bashan is noted for its prosperity, pride and might (compare p63), but also in the Bible because of God's important victory over Og.*

17 Why are you jealous, O many-peaked mountains?

This is the mountain in which God has desired to rest.

*The illogicality of God's choice of mountain dwelling. The passage might, arguably, have originated from any particular sanctuary seeking to legitimate its existence, but within the context of the Hebrew Bible as a whole the most appropriate referent is Zion as God's mountain dwelling, the successor of Sinai, the mountain of God.*

Yea, the Lord will dwell there for ever.

*Conquest of Zion by Joab and David; ascent of the ark to Jerusalem; permanent establishment of the sanctuary there, followed by the building of the temple.*

18 The chariotry of God is twice ten thousand, and thousands redoubled.

The Lord came from Sinai to the sanctuary.

*Sinai has, as it were, relocated to Zion. God's presence has come with the Israelites all the way from Sinai to Zion.*

19 You ascended on high; you led captivity captive

*The ark's ascent of Zion (the verb is used to describe this event in 2 Sam 6). David's victories over surrounding nations?*

You took gifts for man — even the rebellious —

*The spoil of battles and the tribute of those nations David has defeated (compare the location of the moving of the ark relative to the episodes of David's subjection of his enemies in the Samuel narratives). Compare also David's distribution of flesh, bread and wine upon the successful removal of the ark to the city of David. Everyone was rewarded — even David's opponents.*

So that God Yah might dwell.

*The permanent establishment of the sanctuary upon Zion.*

20 Blessed be the Lord — .

From day to day he loads us; God is our salvation.

*selah*

21 God is to us a God of saving acts

And to the Lord LORD belongs the exit from death.

*A reference back to the Exodus, or a more general allusion to military victories?*

22 As for God, he will break the head of his enemies,

The hairy skull of the one who walks in his offences.



23 The Lord said, I will bring (him) back from Bashan,  
I will bring (him) back from the depths of the sea.

*Another Exodus allusion, perhaps in mythologised form. Perhaps also a covert allusion to God's resolve to rescue his people from idol worship at false northern sanctuaries?*

24 That you will dip your foot in blood  
That the tongue of your dogs has its portion from the enemies.

*Reminiscent of Jezebel perhaps(!), but this clearly clashes with the surrounding references and can quickly be eliminated as a possibility.*

25 They saw your processions, O God,  
The processions of my God my King to the sanctuary.

*Journey of ark and people through wilderness (the nations watching in amazement as this journey and the conquest takes place); the procession which accompanied the ascent of the ark to Zion (compare the Philistines watching the ark being led by the cows towards Beth-shemesh and ultimately back into Israelite hands).*

26 The princes went before; behind, the musicians  
In the midst of the young women playing timbrels.

*Compare the performance of Miriam in Exodus 15v1,20;<sup>172</sup> 2 Samuel 6 records that David's 'dancing mightily before the Lord' was accompanied by dancing (and music as well, 2 Sam 6v21) specifically involving young women (v20). There was also a processional procedure, see below p175-177.*

27 In the assemblies bless God —  
The Lord, from the source of Israel .

28 There is little Benjamin, leading them.  
The princes of Judah — their throng,  
The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali!

*Tribes associated with the victory over Sisera.<sup>173</sup> Alternatively, the meristic tribal list emphasises that all Israel was involved in the celebrations. The two royal tribes are both mentioned, but those from the far north are also included. Benjamin was the first tribe to claim territory in the land.*

29 Command, my God, as befits your strength!  
Strengthen, O God, what you have done for us!

30 From your Temple at Jerusalem  
Kings will bring gifts to you.

*Tribute brought to David and Solomon; gifts from Hiram and elsewhere for the construction of the temple?*

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<sup>172</sup> Noted in Midrash: W.G. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, p547.

31 Rebuke the beast of the reeds!

The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,

*Victory over Pharaoh? A number of scholars have suggested that Egypt is the referent of the 'beast of the reeds' phrase, even those who do not hold to the Heilsgeschichte-type approach being worked out here. Or perhaps an allusion to the major, more distant powers in David's day.*

Who submit themselves with pieces of silver.

Scatter the peoples who delight in battles!

*Compare the 'spoiling' of the Egyptians as the Egyptians departed, or, in a later time, the subjection of the nations to David and their peaceful submission (complete with tribute!) to himself and to Solomon.*

32 Envoys come out of Egypt,

Cush hastens to stretch out her hand to God

*A reversal, now, of the Exodus. Note Solomon's marriage to the king of Egypt's daughter, and biblical reference to the Cushites as servants of David.*

33 Kingdoms of the earth, sing unto God!

Play unto the Lord!

*selah*

34 Behold, he rides on the heavens, the ancient heavens!

Lo, he gives his voice, a voice of strength!

35 Ascribe strength to God!

His glory is upon Israel

And his power in the heavens.

36 How awesome you are, O God, from your sanctuary!

*God, having arrived in Zion, is now safely ensconced in his new home.*

He is the God of Israel, who gives strength and power to his people.

Blessed be God!

Even if a number of the suggestions offered above are dismissed as fanciful or are viewed with some scepticism as overly 'harmonising', the fact remains that, in the first half of the Psalm in particular, there are considerable possibilities for reading Psalm 68 as a summary of or as a series of allusions to events recounted in the Hebrew Bible from the Exodus to the establishment of the Monarchy. Indeed, this is how readers ancient and modern have frequently approached the Psalm. Midrash and Targum both pick out many of the connections suggested above, and, at the other end of the spectrum, the NIV Study Bible comments:

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<sup>173</sup> Noted in Midrash: W.G. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, p548.

“Verses 1-18 contain many clear references to God’s triumphal march from Mount Sinai (in the days of Moses) to Mount Zion (in the days of David). The events at Mount Sinai marked the birth of the kingdom of God among his people; the establishing in Jerusalem of the ark of the covenant, symbol of God’s throne, marked the establishment of God’s redemptive kingdom on the earth, with Jerusalem as its royal city. The early church, taking its clue from Eph 4:8-13, understood this Psalm to foreshadow the resurrection, ascension and present rule of Christ and the final triumph of his church over the hostile world.”<sup>174</sup>

A similar approach is taken in the footnotes of the Jerusalem Bible.<sup>175</sup>

With the underlying theme of the movement and dwelling of God in view, there are two historical narrative poles through which this is developed in the Psalm. The first is the Exodus, wilderness and conquest, the second is the days of David, his victory over the nations, and the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem. Given this apparent chronological progression it seems best to consider the suggested allusions back to the Exodus in the second half of the Psalm to be mistaken identifications. They are out of step with the progression which is otherwise visible in the Psalm.

It is important to consider further the extent to which the second pole of allusions to David is present in the Psalm, for in my view it forms a necessary interpretative clue for reading it. Though earlier history (the wilderness, etc) is absolutely vital to the Psalm and gives shape to what will follow, it is the time of David and the establishment of the sanctuary upon Zion that the Psalm is ‘all about’.

### ***A Davidic Reading: Taking the Ark to Zion***

In previous generations of scholarship, a Davidic title would have been a natural licence for searching for an occasion for the Psalm amongst the Davidic narratives in the historical books. Such days are by and large gone; there is no doubt that the approach considerably overemphasised the figure of David in the Psalms and often represented a mistaken understanding of the Psalm titles. Nevertheless, this fact does not rule out the possibility that there may be some Psalms which are greatly illuminated when read in such a manner. I think Psalm 68 is one; the evidence already presented shows that there a number of points where the two texts naturally meet. It is now time to put that suggestion onto a firmer footing.

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<sup>174</sup> *The NIV Study Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987; orig. Zondervan, 1985), p835.

<sup>175</sup> A. Jones (ed.), *Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p847-849.



## David

The data already presented may be revisited and extended by the following points which support the linkage of Psalm 68 with the *biblical account* (and not necessarily the historical reality) of the reign of David, and in particular of the bringing of the ark to Zion. Such a setting:

- Explains why the Psalm should open with a reference to the ark, and focus on God's movement with his people and his dwelling amongst them.
- Explains why the Psalm should find its structural centre in God's choice of a particular mountain and his ascension to his sanctuary.
- Provides a natural context for the processional rejoicing recounted in the Psalm.
- Chimes with the victories over the Philistines and other nations which took place just prior to the bringing of the ark to Zion (cf 'ascending on high', 'leading captivity captive', and all the other references to the destruction of enemies as a description of YHWH's triumph over the Philistines and their gods in the Samuel episodes; according to the biblical narratives the reign of Saul and the period of the Judges were beset by foreign invasion — David put an end to this and became the aggressor who took others captive, winning spoils and tribute for his efforts).
- Supplies a context for the polemic against other sanctuaries and other gods to be found in Psalm 68. David would be implicitly singling out his city and the tabernacle which he had pitched above other sanctuaries which had a much longer history. The triumph of the ark's recapture and ascent was accompanied by a command from Samuel that Israel should put away her idolatry and serve God alone.
- Explains the 'backwards in coming forwards' yet nevertheless determined emphasis on the significance of Jerusalem which David has just established as the new capital of the only recently united Monarchy (note that Zion is not identified explicitly in v16-19; the term Jerusalem does not occur until v30). This uniting of the Monarchy under David also provides a context for the concession to the supporters of David's predecessor in the reference to Benjamin, and in the emphasis on *all* the tribes in the tribal processional list.
- Squares with the triumphant spirit of the Psalm in which the nation is militarily and politically strong, triumph in battle has been a reality, and future victories and the spoil and tribute which accompany them might be anticipated (cf 2 Sam 8).

These points, most of which would be accounted for less convincingly on a different explanation of the Psalm's setting, encourage approaching the problem from the other end: looking at the episodes surrounding the ark's final ascent to Zion to see what links with Psalm 68 may be found.<sup>176</sup>

A first point of interest is the repeated use of the verb עלה in the Samuel accounts, the very verb found in v19 in which God has 'ascended on high and led captivity captive'. It occurs first in 1 Sam 6v19 in which God destroys the men of Beth-shemesh for looking inside the ark: "And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?" Psalm 68 provides the answer to that question. The verb is found again, in the hiphil this time, in 2 Sam 6v2,12 in which the ark is 'brought up' to the city of David.

The story of 1 Sam 6-7 continues in an intriguing vein. 7v2 records the people's lament before God, whereupon Samuel encourages them to religious reform, putting away their false gods and commanding them to return to God from serving Baalim and Ashtaroth (7v3). There is evidently an issue here which Samuel is concerned to address concerning divided loyalty amongst the people. Once the ark returns into Israelite territory in 7v10 the Philistines attack, but now God thunders greatly before them to frighten them, and they are smitten before Israel. Back in line with God once more, Israel now begins to achieve some military success over her enemies. The chapter then closes with a brief description of Samuel's tour of sanctuaries, his circuit of Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpeh and Ramah (v16-17), reminding us that there was not yet a single dominating sanctuary. It would be David, in taking the ark to Zion, who would make the boldest of steps towards achieving it.

This brings us to the account of 2 Sam 6. 6v2,12 refer to the ark's being brought up to the city of David, as we have seen. There are a number of textual connections with Psalm 68 here, probably fortuitous, but interesting nevertheless. In 6v12 the ark is brought up 'with gladness' (בשמחה), an expression which occurs in 68v4. 6v12 also emphasises the connection between the ark of God and his name, a connection not lost on readers of Psalm 68: "they brought up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts (double emphasis: שם שם יהוה צבאות) who sits (שׁוֹבֵט, another Psalm 68 word) enthroned on the cherubim."

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<sup>176</sup> Compare H.M. Weil, "Exégèse du Psaume 68" *Revue de l'histoire des Religions* 117 (1938), p75-89.



Next comes the Uzzah incident, an event which highlights a tension which is apparent in Psalm 68 as well. How can so great and mighty a God come to live in David's city, in a tabernacle which he has pitched? Will the people not be swallowed up by so fearsome a warrior in their midst? Perhaps so, if the correct protocol is not followed, as the Uzzah and Beth-shemesh episodes illustrate. But if treated with the respect and awe that he deserves, an awe which Psalm 68 tries to instil, then there is hope. Once David sees how the house of Obed-Edom is blessed by the presence of the ark in his house, he is only too eager to finish the job he started three months before.

So we arrive at the final leg of the ascent of the ark. It is accompanied by all manner of instruments (6v5) and by a processional ritual of sacrifice (6v13); there is music and rejoicing (v15: 'David and *all* Israel (compare the meristic tribal roster) ... with the sound of trumpet and with shouting'; v21: 'therefore will I play before the Lord'), and David dances mightily before the Lord, girded with a linen ephod (v14). Even this does not exhaust the connections with Psalm 68. The implication of v20 is that there was a particular role for young maidens, a group singled out in Psalm 68, and in v17 the ark is set in its place in the midst of the tabernacle David had pitched for it.

The next verses are perhaps of particular importance:

"(18) And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. (19) And he dealt among all the people, *even* among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece *of flesh*, and a flagon *of wine*. So all the people departed every one to his house. (20) Then David returned to bless his household..." (2 Sam 6v18-20 KJV)

The conclusion of the procession is the blessing of the people through their king in the name of the Lord, and the giving of a gift from the king to the people. The giving of the gift is a most interesting phenomenon. There is a tantalising possibility that this may be the token gift referred to in Psalm 68v19. God has ascended on high to great acclaim and jubilation, he is now seated in the mountain sanctuary which he desired, and the people are united underneath him and underneath their king. A gift for one and all to mark the occasion does not seem too much to ask on the king's part for such a marvellous show of support from his subjects and for such a joyful occasion.

The next chapter, 2 Sam 7, follows immediately with David's wish to build the temple (cf Psalm 68v30), and God's promise to establish him and his throne for ever. The number of



elements from these narratives which help enliven the reading of Psalm 68 makes it a very reasonable hypothesis that these two texts are closely linked. I shall return to this shortly.

### Or Solomon?

There is a modicum of evidence for associating Psalm 68 with the reign of Solomon rather than that of David. First and foremost is the mention of the temple in v30, a building which had yet to be built in David's day, according to the biblical account. The dedication of the temple is portrayed by the biblical writers as a huge event to which even far-flung tribes came in celebration.<sup>177</sup> 2 Chr 6v41 at the close of Solomon's prayer of dedication is an essential passage here, since its language matches closely the opening of Psalm 68:

“And now arise (use of קום), O LORD God, and go to thy resting place (cf ‘God will dwell there forever’), thou and the ark (cf the Ark Saying in Psalm 68) of thy might (use of root עז). Let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation (use of noun חֲשׁוּעָה), and let thy saints rejoice (use of root שָׂמַח) in thy goodness (use of root טוֹב).”  
(2 Chr 6v41, RSV)

Second is the claim that the triumphant picture of victory over enemies and nations paying tribute (not to say the explicit mention of Egypt) fits Solomon's reign better than his father's. However, the biblical portrayal of David as a man of war has more in common with the imagery of Psalm 68 than does the peaceful Solomon, and David was allegedly receiving his fair share of tribute also. To regard the Psalm as referring to Solomon's day is to lose the powerful connection of the ascent of the ark to Zion, a theme much more fundamental to Psalm 68 than the single reference to the temple at Jerusalem in v30. That reference can easily be understood in connection with David by taking it to be a prediction of David's aspirations of what would happen once the proposed temple had been built (parts of the language of this section may be eschatological in any case).

### Or A Later Period?

Thus far I have been implying (though I have deliberately refrained from stating) that the Psalm was written to commemorate the ark's ascent to Zion. However, it might well refer to that incident for a different reason than to celebrate it directly at that time. Psalm 68 might be

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<sup>177</sup> R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985), p514 and J. Vlaaderingerbroek, *Psalm 68* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1973) make this point admirably.

a later composition from any period (subject to the provisos to be introduced in the chapters on dating, below) recalling those earlier stories for some particular purpose.

One very reasonable suggestion along these lines is that it relates to the time of Josiah and the centralisation of the cult. This would explain the polemic against other gods and sanctuaries, and the emphasis that Zion is *the* mountain of God, the natural and rightful successor to a sacred mountain that no-one could doubt, Mount Sinai itself, from which the law was given. According to a traditional and still popular model, the Deuteronomistic history (and thus a significant amount of material recounting the David story in close to its present form) dates from this period, so it would be a simple matter to introduce a Psalm which chimed so well with those episodes, for use at 'David's sanctuary'. On such a view the Psalm has a very definite ideological agenda. The competition and jealousy over the sacred spot God has desired in Psalm 68 may well imply disputes over sacred geography and the issue of centralisation. The Psalm makes its position unmistakeable on these matters.

This view seems to me to be quite logical and largely unobjectionable. One might conceivably think of other scenarios also when Psalm 68's message about David, the ark and God's sanctuary would need a timely restatement — and one could equally propose that the Psalm was written for such an occasion. My own preference however is for the hypothesis that the nucleus of the Psalm may be taken closer to face value. It appears to be written in the first instance to celebrate David's bringing of the ark to Zion — and the simplest hypothesis is that this is indeed why and when it was first written.

## Other Possibilities

Other possibilities have been suggested for linking Psalm 68 to episodes of biblical history. Hezekiah has been advocated, for instance, but such an interpretation neither sufficiently explains the details of the Psalm, nor accounts for its general themes.

Michael Goulder has suggested a novel interpretation, proposing that the Psalm is indeed Davidic, but that it relates to David's return to Jerusalem after his exile during the rebellion of Absalom.<sup>178</sup> It is a brave attempt, and one which contains some persuasive arguments and clever exegesis. Once again, however, the thematic and structural shape of the Psalm ultimately counts against his analysis; the Psalm is predominantly an ideological claim about God and where to worship him rather than a response to an overturned coup. Absalom may

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<sup>178</sup> M.D. Goulder, "The Bitters of Victory (68)" in *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51-72* (JSOTS 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p191-216.



have had some foreigners in his forces, but the Psalm's vision of ultimate world-conquest for God and his people is on an altogether grander scale than Goulder's scheme would allow.

While *portions* of the Psalm may be linked to these or other episodes, the *consistent* relevance of the text provided for David's bringing of the ark to Zion and God's journey from Sinai to Zion is a most powerful support for the proposal.

## **Conclusion**

In this section I have argued that Psalm 68 implies a setting which meshes well with the biblical account of King David, his military successes, the uniting of the Israelites under him, his vision and aspirations for the future, and in particular his bringing of the ark of the covenant to Zion which is seen as the culmination of God's journey with his people from Egypt, via Sinai, and to the promised land.

One can of course immediately argue that those accounts themselves do not fit reality. In this case, Psalm 68 may be regarded as a suitable and desirable text for the group who put together the 'fictional' history of that Davidic period that we possess – whatever its historical value might be (a possibility of composition during the reforms of Josiah along these lines was put forward above). It is important to realise that for the purposes of this section on intertextual connection, the question of when this composition took place (with regard to both the biblical narratives and Psalm 68) does not necessarily need to be answered. Nor is it necessary to know what its motivation was, and why (or whether) such literature was successful in what it set out to achieve. That is a bigger investigation which involves the Samuel accounts as well as Psalm 68. What I have sought to show is that the two texts chime together and illuminate one another, and further, that Psalm 68 was written to reflect the story of what is said of David in Samuel and elsewhere. The event may have happened much like the narratives claim, and the text may have been written as a direct celebration of it. I incline to this possibility and think that it represents the simplest answer to the question of the occasion of Psalm 68. But again, it *might* have been written as a liturgy to celebrate the event or story on subsequent, perhaps annual, celebrations. Or it might have been written for a more abstract, ideological purpose, or perhaps for a combination of all three. What I am arguing here is the establishment of the connection between the texts — that Psalm 68 is recognised to be written to chime with the narrative accounts about the ark, the wilderness and conquest, the victories of David and the bringing of the ark to Zion. Beyond this there is much which we shall probably never know with anything approaching certainty.



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### 3.4. Interplay with Non-Biblical ANE Texts

In a number of interesting ways Psalm 68 interacts with other religious views and texts of the Ancient Near East, particularly the Ugaritic materials. Much of this appears to be polemical in intent rather than a straight copying or utilising of adjacent or earlier traditions. Psalm 68 claims for YHWH what may have been another deity's speciality — and more besides. I shall first review the passages in which 'mythological' ANE elements have been argued to be referred to explicitly (in most cases I shall argue that the allusion is more subtle), following which I examine on a thematic level the more general background of parallel ANE material.

#### ***Explicit References to Canaanite and Other Deities***

There are six places in Psalm 68 where particular terms are used which have been judged by some scholars to link to Canaanite mythology and the Ugaritic texts.

- The most widely accepted example is the expression **כַּבֵּב בְּעֶרְבָת** as an epithet of YHWH in v5. However, against the exact identification with the common Baal epithet 'rider on the clouds' is the fact that **כַּבֵּב בְּעֶרְבָת** is not the same as *rkḇ 'rpt*, despite the obvious resemblance of the two. The presence of the Hebrew preposition **בְּ** coupled with **בְּעֶרְבָת** rather than a **פֶּעַל** in **כַּבֵּב בְּעֶרְבָת** emphasises that the expression in Psalm 68 is a Hebrew or Hebraised form, not simply a piece of Ugaritic text 'cut-and-pasted,' as it were, into a biblical Psalm. The resemblance could have been more direct had the writers/compilers of the Psalm wished it.<sup>179</sup> Instead they chose to create merely an echo of the Baal-epithet, and hammered home the distinctiveness of YHWH by immediately subjoining the phrase '(Yah and hence, not Baal) is his name.' As argued in the notes, there is a *double entendre* between the echo of the Baal epithet and the surface meaning of 'rider through the desert'. It is a mistake to say that this passage represents a simple and direct quotation of the Ugaritic epithet.
- v34 contains another reference to God's riding; this time he is the 'rider on the heavens, the ancient heavens.' The allusion to the Baal traditions is clear enough even if there may not be an exact equation of language.

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<sup>179</sup> Compare J. Vlaaderingerbroek, *Psalm 68* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1973), on 68v5.

- Next comes the term כְּשָׁרוֹת in v7 which scholars such as Albright, Johnson and Miller parallel with Ugaritic *ktrt* and take to be a reference to the goddess Koshar, specialist in midwifery and song.<sup>180</sup> Ortlund phrases his understanding thus: ‘the activities and blessings properly ascribed to the indigenous goddesses are here ascribed to YHWH.’<sup>181</sup> The difficulty with these analyses is that a reference to Koshar has no relevance whatsoever to this verse and its context, as far as I can see. It is as if the opportunity for a Ugaritic connection has been snatched at, without considering how, if correct, it would fit into the verse as a whole. I offer several more probable understandings of the term in the Notes.
- In v23 God asserts that he will ‘bring back from Bashan ... (and) from the depths of the sea’. This has often been given a mythological interpretation by modern scholars, and Albright’s and Mowinckel’s treatments are noteworthy.<sup>182</sup> Bashan is linked to Ugaritic *bṭn*, serpent; 𐎢𐎺 is understood as the god Yamm whom Baal fights in the Ugaritic texts and who is described as a twisting serpent. God will retrieve (and defeat) him even from the depths (of his lair, perhaps?). Day argues against this identification,<sup>183</sup> but I would position myself between the two views. The readiness with which the language can be understood in these mythological terms, coupled with the presence of Baal-language elsewhere in the Psalm, makes the complete dismissal of this possibility unattractive. On the other hand, the verse can readily be understood as a reference to a great mountain (Bashan/Hermon)<sup>184</sup> and the depths of the sea, two locations which are extreme opposites, neither of which present an obstacle to God. From them he can bring either his enemies or his people, depending on how the verse is understood (see Notes). In short, it seems that we have multi-faceted language here which can be read ‘straight’ as a reference to a mountain and the sea, but in which mythological references may also be heard, references which would probably not be lost on many ancient readers, just as they are not lost on many scholars today.

<sup>180</sup> W.F. Albright, “A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems—Ps LXVIII” *HUCA* 23.1 (1950), p19; A.R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967; orig. 1955), p79; P.D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 1973), p21.

<sup>181</sup> R. Ortlund, *Psalm 68*, p509.

<sup>182</sup> S. Mowinckel, *Der Achtundsechzigste Psalm* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1953), p48-51; W.F. Albright, “A Catalogue”, p27-28.

<sup>183</sup> J. Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea – Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 35; Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p113-119.

<sup>184</sup> Compare the earlier references to Bashan in v16; this prior occurrence renders it likely that readers would find a reference to the same mountain here, only 7 verses later.



- The ‘exit(s) from death’ are ascribed to God in v21, and it is worth remembering the Canaanite overtones of the God Mot, literally ‘Death,’ who fought with Baal. It is of course not necessary to see a reference to Mot in v21 by any means, but there may be a suggestive echo in the language. I develop this further in the next sub-section.
- v31 seems a likely candidate for mythological borrowing, although in this case the precise nature and function of the reference is unclear. The verse refers to ‘the beast of the reeds’, which some, such as Eaton, have taken the liberty of translating ‘swamp monster’! Eaton’s translation runs as follows: “He has roared against the swamp-monster and the bull-like powers, trampling the bull-images of the nations into powdered silver; he has scattered the peoples that loved war.”<sup>185</sup> It does appear clear that the creatures referred to are listed in descending order in terms of how fearsome (and fierce) they are (beast of reeds – herd of bulls – calves of peoples), and in the Notes it was pointed out that animal and human terminology appear to be deliberately mixed in the latter two expressions. Although the precise mythological references behind these phrases are not known, it seems clear that these creatures stand for historical enemies,<sup>186</sup> and readers have exercised their ingenuity in trying to identify them (see Notes). It is important not to push this verse too far, however, when the identification of the creatures in question is uncertain both in terms of what is described and what it may represent. LePeau writes of human enemies depicted as chaos monsters,<sup>187</sup> but it is far from clear that the creatures referred to here *are* chaos monsters. We do not know what they are.

In sum these examples show that there are mythological references and allusions to Canaanite literature and traditions in Psalm 68, but that occasionally the enthusiasm of scholars to make these connections may have got the better of them. Psalm 68 uses a variety of literary devices to get over its ideological points, points which include the total supremacy of YHWH. One such device is to allusively pit him against an array of enemies known from elsewhere, and to ascribe to him epithets which are traditionally associated with other deities as if to say that he is all they are, and more besides.

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<sup>185</sup> J.H. Eaton, *Psalms (Torch Bible Commentaries)*; London: SCM, 1967), p170; he cites Ps 74v12f; Ex 32v20; Deut 9v21 as possible parallels.

<sup>186</sup> Compare the way in which cosmic foes stand as metaphors for historical enemies in Ez 29v3; Jer 51v34; Ps 87v4, and the way in which cosmic conflict is used as an image for historical events in Ps 106v9; 77v17-21; 114v1-5; Is 51v9-11. There are few passages in which direct conflict between God and the forces of chaos are referred to (for example, Ps 89v10-11; Job 7v12; 26v12-13). For analysis see W.A. Young, *Psalm 74: A Methodological and Exegetical Study* (unpublished PhD: University of Iowa, 1974), p196-202. For a different approach, see J. Day, *God’s Conflict*.

<sup>187</sup> J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (unpublished PhD: University of Iowa, 1981), p259.

## Thematic Polemic

Equally interesting is the thematic polemic which appears to be taking place within the Psalm. This polemic seems to be directed particularly against Baal. Judging by the frequency with which Baal worship of one form or another is castigated, it seems that Baal is YHWH's single greatest rival for the affections of his people according to many of the biblical writers. There appears a particularly close connection between what is known about Baal from the Ugaritic texts, and what is said of YHWH in Psalm 68.

## The Attributes of Baal

There is no doubting that the Baal of the Ugaritic texts was a violent god, a warrior, a god of the storm. As one of the major biblical texts which presents YHWH as a warrior, Psalm 68 immediately traverses the territory of Baal, and comparison is virtually invited. God marches forth, rides on the heavens, gives his mighty voice, destroys his enemies, is invited to fight with beasts, and meanwhile the heavens pour down and the earth trembles — all this might legitimately be said of Baal. Furthermore, Baal is the bringer of rain (Baal V:ii:38-40; Aqht I:i:43-44) — precisely as YHWH is in v10,11.

Nevertheless, despite these obvious and important similarities, an important distinction is to be noted. Standing behind all this vigorous activity on God's part lies the fact that he is doing it for his people. True, Baal is described as the defender of the fatherless and widow, much as is YHWH in v6 — but Psalm 68 actually *illustrates* him performing this role on behalf of his people in a way that the Baal texts we possess never do. Baal may be the giver of rain and the defender of the helpless, but we are never encouraged to think that these activities mean a great deal to him; on the contrary, his motivation appears to be primarily selfish aggrandisement. By this distinction Psalm 68 claims a great moral victory for YHWH. They may both be powerful gods, able to hold their ground in cosmic battle (or maybe not in Baal's case — see below); but YHWH's love and care for his people (and hence the reason for the bravado) sets him apart.<sup>188</sup>

## A Mountain Home

The residence of YHWH and his ascent to the mountain he has desired is one of the central issues of the Psalm, and one which again finds important links with Baal traditions. Gods in

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<sup>188</sup> LePeau, *Psalm 68*, p88, goes too far with this point. He claims that Baal is nowhere shown ensuring justice for anyone; he is not responsible for judgement on earth — but God can handle this too. This is to overstate the case.



the ancient world traditionally dwelt on mountains, but the particular story of Baal's mountain residence on Zaphon is one which has fruitful links with Psalm 68.

In the Baal epics El gives Yamm a temple/palace which probably equates to a type of promotion over the other cosmic deities. Baal challenges this, and is given to Yamm as a slave. He revolts and overcomes Yamm, but now *he* needs a temple to illustrate his superiority and the fact that he is worth his salt as a god. Eventually he receives one from El on Mt Zaphon. Now Baal is challenged by Mot, who prevails. Baal consequently finds himself in the underworld, and there is no rain since Baal apparently cannot bestow it from his new location. Anat comes to the rescue by attacking Mot (to her belong the exits from death!), Baal revives, and rain descends once more. Baal and Mot now engage in battle again (round 2!), and El tells them to stop lest Mot be deposed. In what is probably the weakest part of the plot, Baal and Mot agree and the story rather whimpers home with this tame ending.

The important features of this account for our purposes are two, given the many parallels between YHWH and Baal which seem implicit in Psalm 68. The first is the location of the mountain which Baal is given, Mount Zaphon to the north (Baal II:iv:19; II:v:23). v16-19 of Psalm 68 describe envious *northern* mountains, and it is quite possible that the peaks of Hermon are intended, an area strongly associated with Baal worship.<sup>189</sup> God spurns these impressive mountains with their mythological associations to align himself with the paltry mount Zion. The second and more important feature of interest in the above tale is that Baal does not directly control where he will live: he is allotted a mountain by El (which he has to ask for, and which he is only granted after much persistence and tough battle). In contrast, the God of Psalm 68 is in full control of where he will live – he will live where he desires, and no one will stop him, even if they think his selection of sacred mountain a little odd. God has spurned the northern mountains, coming instead from the southern mount Sinai and making his abode in Zion. In v22 God promises to bring again his people from the north — perhaps an indication of God's resolve to ultimately turn his people from the worship of Baal to himself.

Baal has to obtain a temple in order to maintain his status as a god, but this temple is merely assigned to him by the superior god El. Baal, unlike YHWH, has no choice in the matter.

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<sup>189</sup> One would like this link between Bashan – Hermon – Zaphor. – Baal to be clearer than it is: interpreting the polemic of Psalm 68 would have been much simpler if v16 had read 'a mountain of God is mount Zaphon'! Nevertheless, the present line of interpretation seems to make more sense of the verses than any other of which I am aware.



YHWH chooses his own mountain, his sanctuary is established and the temple built — and there will be no challengers, for he, unlike Baal, will dwell there for ever.

### 3.5. Other Intertextual Readings

One can read Psalm 68 in the light of other texts also, texts which were not available to it as sources at the time of its composition (for instance, New Testament texts or later texts of Judaism). By doing so one can approximate the process which takes place when later generations of readers apply a text for their own ends. It is important for the student to attempt to wear different interpretative hats, as it were, to hear the text reverberating in different ways according to the assumptions and world-view one brings to it.

The term 'text' should not be narrowly constrained to written texts here. Modern studies of textuality have shown that texts come in a variety of forms of which only a sub-group are written. Written texts are a good place to start, and it is easier to lead a reader through an interpretation when two tangible texts are brought together for comparison as the interpretation is offered. But ideological notions and religious, moral and political systems are also texts in the broader sense, and these may fruitfully be brought into collision with Psalm 68 as well, the interpreter asking what Psalm 68 has to say to someone with some particular outlook.

To engage in this discussion is to move focus from the text to the reader, however. For the purposes of this chapter I wish to demonstrate how Psalm 68 may interact with just one biblical 'text' with which it has been linked by exegetes in the past, the Exile and Return. Towards the end of the dissertation when I place more emphasis on the reader I will perform a similar sort of exercise to hear how the Psalm will sound when brought in relation to Jesus and Moses (p253-256).

#### ***The Exile and Return***

The language of Exodus, wilderness, and entry into the land is used extensively in Isaiah 40-66 to describe the Return from exile in Babylon. The Return is a second Exodus, and Israel travel through the wilderness to enter the land once again, a wilderness and land which God will water and make fruitful. Given that Exodus, wilderness, and conquest language is so dominant in Psalm 68, it is not too taxing an enterprise to read the Psalm in relation to the Return from Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple, and the re-establishment of 'true' worship in Jerusalem. Since one event is interpreted by some biblical writers as a type of the other, it ought not to be difficult to find possibilities of both within Psalm 68 if one looks for them.

Indeed this is the case. Wherever Exodus language is recognised in Psalm 68 one could attempt to apply this to the Exile; it would be hard to differentiate the original 'event' (the Exodus) from the antitype of that event (the Exile), since the latter is elsewhere couched in the language of the former. In my view some scholars have made that mistake. They have found the antitype instead of the type in Psalm 68. Apart from the general congruity of language, certain specific parallels to the Exile have also been claimed, among them:

- The term צִחִיָּה in v7 may describe how the faithless and rebellious part of the people in captivity will be left in the dreary and inhospitable heathen land of Babylon.<sup>190</sup>
- The phrase 'ways out from death' in v21 may refer to the Exodus from Exile.
- The phrase 'depths of the sea' might refer to Chaldea (Isa 44v27; 50v2; Jer 50v1). Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions may be brought to bear to substantiate this.<sup>191</sup>
- 'Beast of the reeds' has also been taken to refer to the jungle and interpreted with respect to Babylon (Psalm 80v14).<sup>192</sup>

I think the identification of these and other allusions with the Exile mistakes the primary meaning of the Psalm. The military language demands a more concrete victory and greater military prowess for Israel than can be assumed at the time of the Return from Babylon. The ark language of the Psalm rings too hollow, for the ark has now disappeared.

But to say only this misses a vital point. Once the Exodus/wilderness/conquest themes have been recognised and properly identified as an account of God's journey from Sinai (not Babylon!) to Jerusalem, the way is still left open for this language to be reinterpreted by later readers living during and after the Exile and Return, so that an extra dimension to the Psalm is obtained. The Psalm can be re-read now, with justification, in the light of the Return. This was not the 'original' meaning of the Psalm, but it is an event to which the Psalm has relevance and about which it has something meaningful to say. Psalm 68 has been a lasting and powerful text precisely because of the continuing relevance of this language as metaphor, and because of this susceptibility to reinterpretation, its ability to say many things to many people.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>190</sup> A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p381; cf 65v2 and elsewhere in 40-66 of the murmurers in Babylon.

<sup>191</sup> According to M. Battenwieser, *Psalms*, p259, צִחִיָּה and ׀ designate Babylon; he argues that expressions such as *mat tamtim* or *tamdim* (= Hebrew תַּחְדִּים) and *mat marratim*, 'the land of the sea' or 'of the deep' in Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions of all periods are used as geographical terms to refer to southern Chaldaea, and later entire Chaldaea.

<sup>192</sup> M. Battenwieser, *Psalms*, p260.

<sup>193</sup> See Chapter 9, and especially Chapter 9.2.



### 3.6. Conclusion

This survey of the intertextuality of Psalm 68 has ranged far and wide, but might yet have gone much further had the investigation been opened up to cover texts which had not yet been written when Psalm 68 was constructed and had it included further biblical texts and ideological (rather than written) texts. Intertextuality provides a helpful way of approaching the history of interpretation, and also of understanding the interpretations of different reading communities today, not to mention assisting in the generation of one's own interpretations. This will be returned to in the final chapters.

Psalm 68 has been shown to have important connections with other ANE texts and traditions, and to engage in an exciting polemic against them. In particular, through both explicit and faint echoes of mythological traditions and Baal-language, the Psalm claims for YHWH what others had claimed was the specialism of their particular deity. The Baal we know from the Ugaritic texts is particularly mocked by the allusion to his epithets and characteristics, but more especially by the implicit taunts of his mountain abode and temple and the way in which he obtained it — all of which stands in contrast to the permanence and splendour of YHWH's home.

But it is the intertextual connections with other Hebrew Bible texts that provide the most fruitful avenue of investigation and provide tremendous help in understanding what was probably the original occasion of the Psalm. Although many individual lines of connection could be drawn between parts of Psalm 68 and a host of other biblical texts, the persistent and concentrated allusion to certain key texts which have generally been deemed to be early poetry is both notable and illuminating. Jud 5, Ex 15, Psalm 18, Deut 33 are all represented here; Psalm 68 is almost a showcase or sampler of early poetic technique, worked together for a new purpose. Ortlund is correct when he describes the Psalm as “a poetic re-working of highly evocative phrases and images borrowed from the highlights of Israel's literary heritage.”<sup>194</sup>

The literary effect of this reworking has also been examined. It is a highly effective technique, for it not only imbues the Psalm with an air of grandeur and importance (not to say familiarity), it also tacitly legitimates or authorises the view of history and the ideological

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<sup>194</sup> R. Ortlund, *Psalm 68*, p376.

agenda being put forward in the Psalm — which may or may not be the agenda of the texts which are being borrowed.

Finally, in examining the connections between Psalm 68 and the events referred to in the Hebrew Bible corpus, a whole series of connections have been discovered between the Exodus, wilderness and conquest accounts on the one hand and the victories of David and the taking of the ark to Jerusalem on the other. Recognising these allusions and connections enables the Psalm almost to interpret itself. This reading concerning the ark and the sanctuary on Zion chimes with the examination of earlier chapters which focussed on the thematic and structural shape of the Psalm; the earlier structural analysis serves to confirm the interpretation being advocated.

## 4. AMBIGUITY & UNDERDETERMINACY

The term underdeterminacy is one borrowed from recent linguistic theory seeking to model utterance interpretation.<sup>195</sup> Utterances do not rigorously or precisely specify *all* the pieces of information necessary to interpret them. Rather, the hearer constructs an interpretation based on linguistic competence and contextual information, making choices about what the utterance might mean. Some sentences are more strongly underdetermined than others, and require more from the hearer in order to interpret them. Thus, 'he killed him' with its two pronouns requires greater interpretative activity than 'John killed the dog'. In English much of the information supplied by the hearer arises from the underdeterminacy of pronouns and anaphora. In other languages, temporal relations and verbal forms may be highly underdetermined.

Since they communicate using human language, texts too have underdeterminacy built into them. The actual words the text contains are not sufficient of themselves to build an interpretation. The reader must supplement the information which the words supply in order to arrive at an understanding. Though an obvious point, it is a concept which is particularly helpful with Psalm 68 since I shall argue below that it is unusually underdetermined. There is evidence of deliberate ambiguity which forces the reader to undertake extra interpretative work. The upshot of this is the possibilities inherent in the Psalm for multiple interpretations.

### 4.1. Types of Underdeterminacy

Virtually all commentators on Psalm 68 begin with an account of the great difficulties inherent in its interpretation, and a summary of its complexity. Given that the Psalm does indeed contain many archaic expressions and words whose meaning is simply not certain, the reader is involved in a series of choices. This is true of a complex text like Psalm 68 much more than it is of a linguistically or thematically straightforward one. It is important to note that this complexity exists at both the linguistic and thematic levels. Individual lexical items may be obscure, and the interpreter needs to make a choice about what they mean. But the

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<sup>195</sup> R.M. Kempson, "Syntax versus Semantics? Shifting Perspectives on Natural Language Content" in K. Aster (ed.), *The Pergamon Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1998); D. Gabbay and R.M. Kempson, "Natural Language Content and Information Flow: a Proof-



juxtaposition of apparently unrelated ideas creates further problems, for this involves the interpreter in an exercise of bridge-building, making choices about why ideas have been combined in the way they have.

### ***Deliberate or Accidental?***

Such difficulties may or may not be deliberate strategies on the part of the author or editors of the Psalm. A writer may choose to use an ambiguous or opaque term deliberately. There may be a choice to juxtapose ideas in a way that would not normally be expected in order to create surprise and to force the reader into a conscious interpretative process (compare Barthes' *scriptible* texts, p138). There seem to be examples in which the Psalm does not make explicit what it so easily could and where there is no textual difficulty in the text. In this way the underdeterminacy and ambiguity inherent in the complexity of Psalm 68 may be deliberate.

However, on many occasions it is equally if not more likely that ambiguity or difficulty *for modern readers* reflects nothing more than the fact that we *no longer* know what the word means or why certain ideas should have been juxtaposed (this may have been the case even for ancient translators and commentators also). Or it may be simply that the text is corrupt and hence presents a range of interpretative choices. As a result of historical accident we may have lost some of the linguistic and contextual keys necessary in order to interpret certain parts or even all the Psalm in a straightforward way. This may be termed apparent underdeterminacy.

It is worthwhile to be aware of this distinction, although it is not an easy or necessarily useful task to decide on a case by case basis whether a given example of ambiguity is real or apparent. We do not know whether or not certain lexical items were widely known and used in the ancient world, or whether a certain juxtaposition of ideas made more natural sense then than it might today. We can only surmise how much 'easier' Psalm 68 was to a putative original audience than it is today. And, once the surmising has been done, the fact remains that for modern readers it matters little on the interpretative level whether ambiguities and complexities were original or not; as interpreters today we are forced to supply the contextual information, to fill in the gaps and to make the choices in order to arrive at a reading of the text.

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theoretic Perspective", to appear in *Language and Philosophy*; D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

## Post-Structuralist Readings

The enterprise of pointing out underdeterminacy in the Psalm which I am about to undertake has something in common with certain kinds of post-structuralist readings. I shall point out the similarities briefly and endeavour to clarify what I am trying to do in relation to them.

Roland Barthes' famous structuralist essay on Jacob's wrestling with the angel<sup>196</sup> was followed in 1988 by another essay on the same topic from a quite different theoretical standpoint.<sup>197</sup> Barthes now sought to demonstrate the essential indeterminate nature of many features of this particular biblical episode by pointing out the ambiguities, underdeterminacies and the lack of specificity within it. In this way Barthes applied techniques from post-structuralist theory to produce results much in line with what I shall show for Psalm 68 below. The difference, however, is substantial. Barthes' point was that the Jacob episode was *typical* of the way texts work in general: all texts, according to post-structuralist theory, are indeterminate, multivalent and underdetermined; there is nothing particularly special about Genesis 32 in this regard. In contrast, I am arguing that Psalm 68 (and possibly Genesis 32 also) is distinctive because of its highly underdetermined content. In the case of almost any other Psalm to which we might point it is not possible to point to the same frequency of interpretative dilemmas through which the reader *must* pass as is the case for Psalm 68.

While saying this, I concur that Barthes' post-structuralist point is also valid: all texts are to some degree indeterminate and susceptible to multiple readings. But that point does not contradict my own, that there is a difference of degree. With most texts one has to go *looking* for other readings if one wishes to find them. In order to get them it may be necessary to exploit ambiguities of the kind that are not really ambiguous at all to the average reader (as against the post-structuralist literary critic). For instance, the pronoun 'them' in my previous sentence would be interpreted quite naturally by 99% of readers to refer back to 'other readings.' In that sense there is no ambiguity at all. However, if one was *looking* for other readings, it would be possible to choose some other referent for 'them' ('post-structuralist' interpreters, for instance). Most readers would not do this, nor would such a possibility interest them; but theoretically my sentence was indeterminate and ambiguous (as any sentence using anaphora must be). Thus, while it is true that all texts are indeterminate in

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<sup>196</sup> R. Barthes, "La lutte avec l'ange: analyse textuelle de Genèse 32:23-33" in R. Barthes et al., *Analyse Structurale et Exégèse Biblique* (Neuchâtel, 1971), p27-40.

some sense and are susceptible to an infinite number of readings, for most readers/interpreters this is a fact of little practical consequence: they simply get on with the job of extracting the 'obvious' meaning of the text. My point is that, because of its high proportion of ambiguities and underdeterminacies, Psalm 68 is unlike most texts in this regard. It demands a higher number of interpretative decisions of its readers than most texts, and it is not possible to extract an 'obvious' meaning from it immediately — precisely because of its underdetermined nature. I now present the evidence for this.

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<sup>197</sup> R. Barthes, "Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-33," in *The Semiotic Challenge* (New York, 1988), p246-260. See also J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament – Method in Biblical Study*, revised and enlarged (Louisville: W/JKP, 1996; orig. 1984), p223-224.



## 4.2. Underdeterminacy in Psalm 68

What is it that makes Psalm 68 a difficult text? What is it within the text which has given rise to so many differing interpretations? I suggest it is principally the underdeterminacy inherent in it, as exemplified in the following examples:

1. *Interpretation of tenses in its opening section.* Are the verb forms in the opening stanza and beyond to be understood as jussives, as futures, or as present-tense statements of fact as to what God is like, perhaps irrespective of any temporal location? Of course this is an underdeterminacy which arises because of the nature of the Hebrew language and its verbal system. But the ambiguity it creates is nevertheless a major interpretative issue in this Psalm. For the very underdeterminacy here enables interpreters to approach the Psalm as a cultic/celebrative act or a petition for God's future involvement (reading jussives), as a depiction of a certain future eschatological visitation of God (reading imperfect futures), or as the presentation of certain historical occasions or general truths about God. Choosing a tense for these verbs in English translation is a major interpretative decision, and one in which the multivalency of the Hebrew is immediately lost.
2. *Lack of sufficient information to identify events referred to with certainty.* The battle scene in v12-15 is a classic case. It appears to describe concrete historical details, and yet these cannot be precisely identified.<sup>198</sup> The Psalm at once invites and withholds the possibility of identification, leaving interpreters the freedom to make their own guesses and thus in a sense enabling everyone to be 'right'. The battle scene is deliberately crafted in general terms so that the reader can create a reference to the particular victories he or she wishes to celebrate. Ortlund helpfully points out that the battle takes on a typical significance by virtue of the allusive word pictures through which it is described.<sup>199</sup> To use Ortlund's terminology, the descriptive phrases of these verses are 'cumulative and paradigmatic, not specific and punctual.'

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<sup>198</sup> Note especially God's scattering of kings 'there' (v15). The pronoun seems intrusive, for it deliberately asks readers to choose a referent (the occasion/location on which God did this), without providing one in the context. I suggested above that הָיָה may perform a structural function here, linking back to the 'when' clauses of v8; p107.

<sup>199</sup> R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985), p510. One might argue that the mountain is not Bashan since Bashan is identified as a many peaked mountain (v16), whereas v17 states that the many peaked mountains are

3. *The identity of God's mountain is not specified.* This is a staggering omission given the prominence of this theme in the central stanza of the Psalm, v16-19. It is ironic that a Psalm whose climax is all about God's chosen mountain should not nail down definitively which mountain it is. When it is stated in v17 that 'the Lord will dwell *there* for ever', we are left not knowing where it is! Although perhaps reading against the grain, it could even be Bashan which is meant! In v16 we are first told that mount Bashan is the mountain of God, a most surprising statement.<sup>200</sup> In a canonical reading of the Psalm one would naturally interpret the mountain to be Sinai or Zion, and other clues suggest that Zion is the better option. But the text is subversive in that *it does not say*. A number of readings is possible, and given the centrality of this topic, such ambiguity is disturbing.
4. *The nature of the ascent in v18-19 is similarly unclear.* There are many further ambiguities surrounding the ascent, in addition to its location. Was a specific occasion in view, what captivity was or is taken captive, what is meant by the curious expression of 'giving gifts בְּאֵדָה', and who will dwell as a result? There are all kinds of issues here which could have been made explicit, yet interpreters are left in doubt. Indeed, there is even ambiguity as to who it is who is ascending. If the dwelling at the end of the verse is taken to refer to יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ then the way is opened to read a subject other than God for the first part of the verse, 'you ascended on high' referring now not to God but to another party. Jewish exegesis has exploited just such an ambiguity, the Targum taking the verse to refer to Moses and his ascent of Sinai to receive the law.
5. *Use of unusual or insufficiently specified expressions.* Examples are: 'beauty of the house,' 'wings of a dove covered with silver...', 'ways out from death,' 'beast of the reeds,' 'herd of bulls...', 'I will bring from Bashan' (bring what/who? — enemies, Israel?). Often it is the abrupt appearance of such images and phrases which is surprising (juxtaposition and meaning in v11; the nature of God's announcement in v12 and the flow of the verses in v8-15 more generally; v14 in its entirety; the relevance of v18; God's announcement in v23; placement and meaning of v31 — and so on.
6. *Use of rare, ambiguous or archaic vocabulary.* Hapax legomena and other troublesome vocabulary was discussed above, p74-76, and Notes. Examples include: כְּשֶׁרוֹחַ, זֶה סִינִי, שִׁפְחִים, etc.

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jealous because God has not chosen them. Of course there may be other many peaked mountains than Bashan, leaving open the Bashan reading.

<sup>200</sup> There is ambiguity even here since the phrase 'mountain of God' could be understood as meaning huge mountain, the text playing with different ways of interpreting *elohim*. See Notes.



7. *Pronouns without obvious antecedents.* Where does God's household or beast dwell in v11, and why draw attention to it with a pronoun when the location is not clear? Further pronouns with **א** are to be found in v15,18. Neither are necessary, yet by their presence they force the reader to choose a referent. The phrase **אֵלֶּיךָ לָנוּ פָּעִלְתָּהּ** in v29 also raises the question of just what it is that God has done which he must strengthen. The text does not specify.

## Conclusions

It is helpful to revisit two issues: first, the origin of this complexity and underdeterminacy; second, its function or effect. It is unquestionably true that the Psalm presents greater difficulties for the modern reader than it did for the ancient Israelite, and in this sense ambiguity has *become* a literary feature of the Psalm, even if it were not so originally. At the most basic level it has been created through uncertainty as to the meaning of words, expressions and images, and through the loss of the original contexts in which the Psalm was used. Complexity has probably arisen as a combination of deliberate strategy (whether editorial or compositional to make the Psalm speak for different audiences), textual history, and historical accident in that the meaning of terms has been lost. It is not necessary or possible to judge on a case by case basis whether a particular example is a feature of the Psalm originally or whether it is only an aspect of modern attempts to interpret it. What is important, once the two options have been looked at, is to be aware of this very real issue, and to look at the way in which it affects the process of interpretation including the possibilities for multiple readings of the Psalm.

Functionally, the underdeterminacy present when the Psalm is studied today has the same effect whether it was originally present when composed/redacted or whether it was not. The modern reader is forced to make choices: by virtue of what the Psalm refuses to state explicitly, by the fact that readers still want to build an interpretation of it despite losing its original context, and by the number of choices the Psalm offers as to what its words and phrases mean, and why they should have been juxtaposed in the way they have. In *this* Psalm, more than most others, the history of interpretation thus furnishes a particularly interesting study. Albright himself commented: "What a poet means is notoriously uncertain, and the more gifted the poet the greater the number of possible interpretations of his meaning."<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems—Ps LXVIII" *HUCA* 23.1 (1950), p1.



The net effect of the underdeterminacy and complexity of Psalm 68 is that interpreters have to work overtime and the possibility of different yet viable readings is increased. The underspecified descriptions which seem to invite precise historical identification but which are sufficiently general not to demand it allow readers to relate the text to their own situations and to interpret and apply it for their own ends.<sup>202</sup> Ambiguity of language can be helpful to the continuing relevance of the Psalm, and this may also be either deliberate or a helpful by-product of the way in which the Psalm has been written.

The complexity of the Psalm also creates a certain atmosphere or aura about it, particularly when that complexity derives from the use of unusual expressions and juxtapositions of vocabulary and ideas. The exuberance and volume of different imagery and vocabulary imparts a distinctive air to the Psalm, an impression, perhaps, of importance and significance, a sense of grandeur and antiquity.

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<sup>202</sup> It is possible that parts of the Psalm may have been rendered more ambiguous by editors in order to make it more relevant for later readers and to enable new interpretations.

# **PART III**

## **THE WORLD OF 'AUTHOR' AND READER**

Hitherto I have implicitly taken Psalm 68 as a single continuous block of text, which is indeed how it has existed for two millennia. But was it always thus, and are we mistaken to consider it as one single composition? In this section I examine the matter of authorship closely, focussing on whether Psalm 68 is a unified or composite text and asking what can be known about its author(s) and compositional history. Many scholars have claimed that it is a mistake even to attempt to read the Psalm as a continuous piece, and I enter into this debate in some detail.

Looking at authorship involves the determining of a setting for the Psalm (a task which builds on the conclusions of the previous section). What can be deduced about the implied readership of the Psalm, and what was the Psalm used for when it was originally written? This takes us into the area of cultic settings, a matter which has received considerable attention by a previous generation of scholarship. I shall, however, question what can be inferred with any certainty about a possible cultic setting.

Finally, I turn briefly to other readers of the Psalm, those who approach the text after its original composition and function. What will they make of the Psalm, and how? I pay tribute to the continued power of the Psalm throughout the centuries, while also pointing out some of the less positive aspects of the way in which it has been used. This part is not intended to be a history of interpretation, for there is insufficient space to undertake that task. Instead I present some concluding sketches about the potential for the Psalm to be used in different contexts and for different audiences (as witnessed in the history of interpretation), and I ask what it is about the Psalm which has enabled it to speak with such conviction and power throughout the centuries, and which still holds fascination today.

## 5. UNITY AND COMPOSITIONAL HISTORY

In this chapter I shall first of all examine the range of positions which may be taken with respect to the unity or otherwise of Psalm 68. I argue that, even if one takes a strong theory of disunity (such as those advanced by Albright or Battenwieser), a full holistic exegesis of the text must still play a fundamental role. However, this requirement to take seriously the final form of the text does not rule out the legitimacy of the question of its compositional history. One can still ask whether readers *ought* to look at the Psalm as a unity (rather than a jumble or subtle arrangement of collated compositions, depending on one's view), even if that is what happens in practice. I then examine some influential disunity proposals, but will conclude that there is insufficient evidence to drive them. Although the Psalm may not have been created as a unified composition it is not possible, at the present state of knowledge, to provide a detailed account of the compositional process it underwent. I make some tentative suggestions nevertheless, and conclude by summarising evidence which emphasises the integrity of the Psalm.

### 5.1. Unity and Disunity: the Options

Because of its disparate content and paratactic style Psalm 68 has frequently been regarded as a composite work — if ever there were evidence for disunity in a text or a case for elaborate theories of composition involving the splicing and concatenation of other texts, then it might be said that one could find it here. There are four broad positions one might take, as set out below.

#### *Four Options*

These are ranked with the more unified understandings towards the top, progressing gradually towards the strongest statement of disunity.

1. The Psalm is a unity, to all intents and purposes the work of one 'author' or 'community,' created at one point in time and with only the most minor accretions (in the form of scribal glosses and the like) from later times.
2. The Psalm has had a more complex compositional history, containing materials which were reworked and added to before it attained its present form. However, although



certain parts may be judged to be secondary, it is not possible *precisely* and *discretely* to separate out any 'original(s)' from the Psalm as we now have it.

3. The Psalm is clearly made up of separate compositions which have been sewn together and interwoven, and which may or should be separated in order to understand better the original form of the Psalm(s) and the traditions (both literary and cultic) that gave rise to the present amalgam.
4. The Psalm is in reality not a 'Psalm' at all but a catalogue of hymnic incipits or completely unrelated poems, parallels to which have allegedly been found in other ANE materials. In modern terms, to treat the Psalm as a unity would be akin to finding the title page of a hymn-book and reading the list of titles as though they were a single hymn!

Most who accept the unity of the Psalm would take a position similar to 1 or 2 (in practice few scholars have sought to distinguish between these two); the proposals of disunity numbered 3 and 4 are distinct from one another, and each has carried the support of influential scholars.

### ***Why a Unified Treatment is Necessary***

There are several reasons why an attempt to treat the Psalm as a unity is enjoined on all scholars. Since the text comes to us as a unity we must begin with an attempt to read it as such. Only when the text is thoroughly examined in its present form and the attempt has been made to read it as a unity can it be known whether or not hypotheses of a composite origin are required. Only if the attempt to make sense of the Psalm as a single text proves abortive — and too often in the history of scholarship the quest for origins has begun before this can be known — is it legitimate to entertain theories that the Psalm is, say, a collection of incipits or entirely unrelated poems which have been 'accidentally' joined.

Nevertheless, at a relatively early stage of analysis it may be appropriate to consider weaker theories of composite origin (such that a number of earlier works have been edited together or that a skeleton poem has received major additions). Even here, however, the importance of the final form of the text must not be forgotten. The text as we now have it is important for all interpreters, whether they are interested in synchronic or diachronic analysis, whether or not they are interested in 'origins':

1. The present form of the text is the only form we have; it is a reality. In contrast, all other putative sources are ultimately scholarly constructs, no matter how careful the analysis that produced them. Such constructs may well reflect reality also. Or they may not.

2. In chronological terms, for the vast majority of its history Psalm 68 has been read and interpreted as a unity, as a text which has something important and coherent to say as it stands. The text has had its longest influence in human society in its present form. This renders the analysis of it in that form imperative.
3. Even today, the majority of readers who read Psalm 68 do so not as source-critics aware of the complex possibilities of redactional activity, but as readers of a single, unified text who want to know what it meant for those for whom it was written and what it might mean for today. The importance of the text in the twentieth century arises in part because such readers still exist. It is thus vital to study the text as is to understand it from the perspective in which it is normally received.

It is for these reasons that a consideration of the text in its present form (as carried out in the previous section) is a starting point to all further study — and ought not to be left behind even if a complicated compositional history be hypothesised.

What, though, of Psalm 68 in particular? The analysis thus far has already suggested a considerable degree of cohesiveness within Psalm 68 as a whole and has delineated a number of themes or motifs which unite it. One of the principal reasons why these have been missed by so many previous studies has been the eagerness to proceed too quickly to the question of origins. Many have been so quick to fragment the text and divide it into its putative sources that they have missed the unifying features it contains. The methodological points set out above (which apply to the study of any text) are strengthened in the particular case of Psalm 68 by the evidence of unifying features that has already been presented. Much can be gained by considering the Psalm as a unity; the text is not so fragmentary as to yield the attempt to consider it as a whole an unfruitful or artificial task.

Indeed, the task of reading the Psalm as a whole is arguably of much greater exegetical interest than the fragmentation of the poem. It is all too easy to propose distinct origins for parts of a text which apparently fit ill with one another: to suggest fractures, concatenation of once-separate poems, glosses, and other redactional activity, can serve as an escape clause to explain anything that is difficult or out of the ordinary. It can obviate the need to struggle with what may simply be a difficult text because it was written that way, or a juxtaposition of ideas unfamiliar to Western minds. To grapple with a text as it is and to try to make sense of



it in that state is both more challenging and more stimulating. I suggest that it may produce more interesting results.<sup>203</sup>

### ***Compositional History***

It must be stressed that the arguments presented above do not rule out the need to consider the compositional history of the text.<sup>204</sup> The fact that the text is important as it stands does not mean that it originated as a unity, or that its origins are insignificant. In later chapters I shall inquire into this history.

The uncertainty which accompanies all such discussion is worth drawing out here nevertheless. There are so many different possibilities as to how the text *might* have developed, and so little concrete evidence to establish or choose between them. It seems to me that in the end one can do little more than venture tentative opinions. On the whole scholars have been too eager to *assert* compositional history without defending or even supporting their hypotheses.

A particular difficulty of this line of enquiry, and an area of considerable neglect, is the positing of reasons as to why, once a theory for the development of a text has been established, it should have developed along those particular lines. To assert that a text is made of three pre-existing texts a, b and c, linked together with additions x, y and z is not sufficient. One must ask *why* these texts should have been so linked and what might have motivated the further stages of redactional activity. This question may not be side-stepped since it is an authorial (or redactional) question, and any enquiry into the compositional history of a text is an authorial (or redactional) matter. If one analyses only the final form of the text it is possible (though not necessarily wise) to avoid this question of purpose of

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<sup>203</sup> Against this it may be observed that exegetical ingenuity has nothing to do with the reality of the origins or meaning of a text. Unified readings of texts which are in fact composite illustrate nothing more than the ingenuity of the expositor and the desire to find order in chaos. Any jumble of text can be explained as a unity if one tries hard enough (cf. R. Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989; orig. 1985), p64-65. However, while the 'reality' of the origins or (original) 'meaning' of Psalm 68 cannot be known, the only 'reality' that we do have is the text which has come to us in one piece. If meaning is located in the text or in the reader, then all attempts to read it as a whole text are valid, irrespective of whether this was the form it originally took. Fragmenting the text can enable the exegete to escape this duty too lightly.

<sup>204</sup> For a helpful discussion of the continued importance of this question and the way in which it is often unjustly sidelined by advocates of 'literary approaches' see D. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant – Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), Chapter 1. On the continued importance of the traditional methods of historical criticism see also J. Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches" in J. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p9-20, and also his "Introduction" in the same volume.



composition since one can claim interest in the text itself or in the readerly process, rather than in authorial intentionality. But if one examines compositional history and posits redactional activity and textual concatenation it is an imperative question.

Yet it is one which is frequently ignored or passed too lightly. If it is claimed that Psalm 68 is a disunity, one must explain why these disparate parts should have been joined and/or why redactors should have been active at those particular points within it where fracture lines are perceived. Fractures are all too often simply stated, and in doing so the difficult text or incongruity is regarded as having been 'explained' — and the expositor moves on.

The reason for this avoidance is that the 'why' question is a perilous one. If one finds reasons to explain why texts should have been joined together which are sufficiently strong, then these *may* serve equally as valid reasons why a single author might have written the whole lot in the first place. John Barton has called this phenomenon 'the disappearing redactor'. If the redactor unites his materials with sufficient skill, where is the evidence that he existed in the first place? If there are no reasons for him to bring multiple texts together in the first place, then how do we explain the presence of our text without resorting to the claim that it is a historical accident? Or perhaps that is sufficient explanation, even if it is uninteresting.

In short, unless one accepts the presence of Psalm 68 as a single text in the Psalter as a huge historical accident then one must inquire why it should have been produced, whether as a unified composition or as a composite work. A composite explanation will only fare better than a unified explanation if it can be shown that the alleged sources of the text must have originated from different periods, and if a reasonable theory can be put forward as to why a later redactor might have sought to unite them. Otherwise a theory of unified composition is just as adequate and it is only a matter of one opinion over another. We shall return to these matters once the more extreme disunity proposals have been discussed.

## 5.2. Disunity Proposals

I first examine and evaluate the general motivation for all forms of disunity proposals. I then examine several specific proposals more fully and present arguments against them (first Robinson and Albright for option 4 on p202 above; then Schmidt and Battenwieser for option 3). All these are treatments by influential scholars and they are representative of the various disunity proposals that have been made. I have not deemed it profitable endlessly to catalogue all variations, since all such approaches are, I believe, fundamentally flawed with respect to Psalm 68.

### ***General Motivation***

The reasons why scholars have generated theories of extreme disunity for Psalm 68 may be briefly stated:

1. The paratactic, atomizing style of the text: its constituent parts often do not seem to flow on from one another; new sections appear to have little connection with what has preceded; there are frequent changes of subject and grammatical person.
2. Some parts of the Psalm are linguistically and thematically relatively straightforward to interpret; others are notoriously difficult. This inequality in language, style and theme suggests different origins for the different sections. It might be argued that the various parts of the Psalm are representative of different periods of Hebrew language and literature.
3. For those working with the insights of form criticism, Psalm 68 contains a plethora of different forms which supposedly require different (and perhaps irreconcilable) settings in life.
4. Many scholars have failed to find any thematic unity or any occasion (whether historical or cultic) which would adequately account for the Psalm. This inability may suggest that the text is composite.<sup>205</sup>

These points, particularly the first and second, are substantial and deserve comment. Other more minor points may be brought to bear in support of specific theories (such as incipit

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<sup>205</sup> In practice it seems to me that many scholars have been so struck by the preceding points that they have not made sufficient effort to search for a unifying theme, progression of ideas, or occasion.

collections in other ANE literature to support Albright's view as described below), but the force of these points probably underlies all disunity proposals.

But it is because of these very matters that the preceding sections of this dissertation have been painstaking and long. Unifying vocabulary and themes as well as the progression of ideas in stanzas, strophes, verses and lines have been meticulously charted to illustrate that connections *do* exist. Whether I have been sufficiently successful in demonstrating them as to remove the need for disunity theories based on point 1 above remains for others to judge. But I have certainly shown that there are connections (whether to be regarded as fortuitous, strained, elaborate, or deliberate) and that it is possible and viable to read the Psalm in a unified way despite its uneven flow and atomizing style.

The very paratactic atomizing nature of the text (point 1) can itself be regarded as a literary feature of the Psalm as a complete, unified text. The argument about the style of the Psalm does not inevitably lead to the conclusion of disunity; other 'early' poetry, particularly Jud 5, manifests a similar atomizing style, and many biblical texts change speaker and grammatical subject all too abruptly for Western readers. The observation about other atomizing texts and Jud 5 in particular proves nothing of course, since scholars have alleged the disunity of that text also (although others have argued convincingly to the contrary).<sup>206</sup> Nevertheless, if a sufficient number of texts with strong parallels to Psalm 68 betray a tendency toward atomization and parataxis this renders it more likely to be a stylistic feature rather than a basis for fragmenting the Psalm. Other important stylistic features have been found across the Psalm as a whole, the most significant of which are the intertextual allusions and echoes to other texts and events of the Hebrew Bible.

This brings us to point 2. There are parts of Psalm 68 which are easy to understand in both a linguistic sense and in terms of their content. Such sections are typical of what might be found in any number of Psalms; there is nothing particularly distinctive about them. But other sections seem to be from a different world. How can this be explained?

Several preliminaries must be made. First, this phenomenon is a part of the one just considered and may be found in other texts, notably Jud 5. It is not unique. Second, it remains to be seen whether there are sections of Psalm 68 which are truly 'incompatible' with one another in terms of linguistic style, dating, or theological outlook. The 'easier' parts of Psalm 68 might have originated from any number of points in the period of the composition of the



Hebrew Bible; it is the 'difficult' parts which will provide the test cases. The third and most substantial point is that to treat the differences between the parts of Psalm 68 as evidence for disunity is probably looking in completely the wrong direction. A better explanation will now be proffered.

Substantial evidence was brought forward in chapter 3 to demonstrate the intertextual techniques employed by Psalm 68. Psalm 68 builds on and reworks other texts: this is one of its favourite literary strategies. Albright and others have mistakenly sought to explain the different materials in Psalm 68 as the random (or otherwise) juxtaposition of entirely separate pieces — because they have failed to appreciate Psalm 68's use of quotation and intertextual allusion. There *is* difference and unevenness in the various parts of Psalm 68, *but this is because it deliberately pulls in references, allusions and influences from other texts!* This technique has been witnessed in detail throughout the Psalm in my earlier section, and it is a reasonable corollary assumption that some of the other parts of the Psalm which are so difficult to interpret are such precisely because we can no longer pick up on the allusions that are being made. In those sections it is as though modern readers are the outsiders to an in-joke.

It is worth taking an example to illustrate this point. On the surface one might reasonably claim that v11-13 and v8-9 had little to do with their surrounding contexts or with each other. Yet both these sections are related to one another, and to much of the rest of the Psalm, in that they both allude heavily to Jud 5. Psalm 68 seeks, as it were, to sprout links to Jud 5 whenever it has the opportunity. But it makes links to other texts as well; this technique is a defining feature of the Psalm. One has to be very careful about pulling the Psalm apart when it seems to be seeking to do the opposite: to pull together a plethora of allusions from a variety of sources and to unite them in some scheme. Albright and others correctly recognised the disparate nature of our text, but that recognition has been misapplied. Albright failed to spot the intertextual borrowings and allusions in the Psalm as a whole, yet it is this technique which probably provides the best explanation for its unevenness.

Points 3 and 4 in support of disunity proposals may be dealt with much more cursorily. Form critical analysis of Psalm 68 will be conducted later, but it may already be pointed out that there are many other texts of mixed genre in the Hebrew Bible and that it would be unwise to use the multiple forms in Psalm 68 as a major argument to fragment it. Form critical analysis

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<sup>206</sup> For instance A. Globe, "The Literary Structure and Unity of the Song of Deborah," *JBL* 93 (1974), p493-512. For a summary of the evidence see M.A. Vincent, "The Song of Deborah", *JSOT* 91 (2000), p61-82.

may yield tremendous insights for many Psalms, but there may well be other texts for which its application will yield more limited results. Finally, the fourth point is one which has been fuelled by the other three. It is because of points 1-3 that attempts to find unifying features within Psalm 68 have frequently not gone far enough. I have spent a large part of this dissertation identifying such features, and it is clear that there are a sufficient number to make the hypothesis of the Psalm's essential unity a tenable position at the very least.

In conclusion, although the points raised in support of disunity theories are weighty, they are not necessarily sufficient of themselves to demand that we look for a composite explanation of Psalm 68. They may legitimately be raised in support of such theories, and it may turn out that one such theory is correct or provides the most likely explanation of the origins of Psalm 68. But the evidence considered here is not sufficient to *require* such an explanation.

A fundamental problem with the disunity analyses hitherto is that they assume rather than demonstrate the disunity of Psalm 68, despite the fact that the composition appears in the Psalter as a unity.<sup>207</sup> I have analysed the underlying motivation for disunity proposals myself, but such discussion is all too rare amongst the very scholars who embrace such theories. No methodology is developed to distinguish between the alleged 'parts' of the Psalm, yet this must rank as a prerequisite for any such attempt.<sup>208</sup>

I now turn to the specifics of some of the influential disunity proposals that have been made.

### ***Some Representative Views***

I have chosen to examine the positions of four scholars who reject the unity of Psalm 68.

#### **A (Random) Collection of Poems or Hymnic Incipits?**

Two scholars, T.H. Robinson and W.F. Albright, have argued strongly that to identify Psalm 68 as a Psalm or poem in the normal sense is a mistake. It is not sufficient, on their view, to claim that the text had a composite origin and was somehow assembled into a poem. For them this is a fundamental mistake of genre recognition; since Psalm 68 is not to be regarded as a 'poem' or 'Psalm' in the conventional sense. Any attempt to find connections between

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<sup>207</sup> This point is also made by S. Mowinckel, *Der achtundsechzigste Psalm* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1953), p10,11 and by J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (unpublished PhD: University of Iowa, 1981), p13.

<sup>208</sup> Mowinckel's criticisms along these lines hit hard: S. Mowinckel, *Der achtundsechzigste*, p25,27,33,49,56,63.



the disparate parts of the text would be a misreading, a readerly imposition of no relevance to their historical quest.

T.H. Robinson identified 18 independent fragments of poetry within Psalm 68. He felt that no one (cultic) occasion, however elaborate, would be able to explain the bringing together of so many diverse fragments into one Psalm. Instead he proposed that the fragments which he identified within Psalm 68 were excerpts from a hymn book which had simply been strung together for convenient safe-keeping. He wrote that Psalm 68 “is a collection of sentences and phrases taken from a number of different poems, and strung together haphazard. It is almost as if a page from the index to a hymn-book (though the fragments are seldom taken from the opening lines of their respective poems) had strayed into the text.”<sup>209</sup>

Albright’s view was a little more sophisticated. He proposed that Psalm 68 is a catalogue of opening lines or incipits of various lyric poems (rather than epics), pace Robinson. He sought to demonstrate the existence of such incipit collections in Sumerian, Akkadian and Ugaritic literature, and he saw examples of incipits within the Hebrew Bible also at Ex 15v21; Num 10v35 (taking the ark saying to be an incipit of Psalm 68v2); Num 21v17,18; 1 Sam 18v7 and Isa 23v16.

Relatively few scholars have accepted Albright’s thesis wholeheartedly, though most refer to it (Robinson’s view is discussed rather less often, but given the similarity of the proposals and the fact that Albright’s is the more recent and detailed treatment, this is probably justified). Albright’s position was roundly condemned in Mowinckel’s monograph on Psalm 68 — and in some detail, given the stature of Albright in the scholarly world at that time.

Some scholars have registered support for areas of Albright’s reasoning and conclusions nevertheless. Patrick Miller’s brief comments, comparing Mowinckel’s treatment with Albright’s as two opposing poles, is representative:

“Most discussions since these works were published have built upon them without following either all the way. Mowinckel’s attempt to find some sort of unity within a context of worship is a valid endeavour, but with regard to this particular Psalm not necessarily a fruitful one. The possibility of an older unified poem underlying this one cannot be completely denied, but the present state of the text points much more clearly to a piecing together of isolated bits of poetry or *incipits*. The fitting of every single verse into a clear scheme, such as Mowinckel attempts, does not seem entirely feasible

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<sup>209</sup> T.H. Robinson in W.O.E Oesterley, *The Psalms*, vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1939), p320.



at this stage of our knowledge. Here Albright is surely correct in seeing that various parts of this Psalm were not originally connected, even if his atomizing into thirty or more incipits seems rather extreme despite precedent in Akkadian sources.”<sup>210</sup>

Miller is clearly siding with Albright here, although does not wish to commit himself wholeheartedly to that view. As far as I am aware, no one has seriously grappled with Mowinckel’s arguments against Albright’s view, much less refuted them. Miller certainly does not do so, and in my view Mowinckel takes Albright’s theory to pieces and shows its inadequacy with some skill. In his dissertation, LePeau in turn repeats these arguments and adds some of his own. The following objections incorporate the reasoning of Mowinckel and LePeau along with points of my own.

- There are serious questions over Albright’s demonstration of incipit collections in other ANE cultures. Mowinckel examines this in some detail and concludes that Albright has overstated his case. Some of the sources Albright cites are not truly incipit collections at all, and others may or may not be so analysed. Furthermore, the existence of such a genre in other cultures, even if it were established more convincingly, in no way implies that it must exist in Israelite literature.
- Instead, most of Albright’s ANE material demonstrates merely that works were referred to and identified by abridged titles, first lines, or even single words. This does not help in arguing that Psalm 68 is a collection of these. Furthermore, if Albright’s thesis is correct, the task of abridging and condensing the poems listed in Psalm 68 has not been undertaken very efficiently. Some of his ‘incipits’ would be quite long and unwieldy ways of identifying individual poems, a far cry from citing the first line of a hymn or the name of a tune.
- Albright is unable to point to any other examples of incipit collections or catalogues in the Hebrew Bible or in ancient Israelite literature. This is perhaps the most serious gap of evidence in his case.
- He does, however, quote examples of what he believes to be instances of individual incipits within the Hebrew Bible. Here, too, problems arise. He terms Ex 15v21 a ‘parade example’ (p7), yet the words of Miriam which echo Moses’ opening to the Song of the Sea are nothing more than a refrain or chorus to the Song which has just been rehearsed. To refer to this as an incipit which identifies or singles out the Song as a kind of

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<sup>210</sup> P.D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 5; Cambridge Mass.:

shorthand is misleading and unhelpful. Similarly Num 10v35, the Ark Saying, is allegedly an incipit of Psalm 68v2-3a. But this is circular, for 68v2-3a is itself an incipit on Albright's theory; we are now being given incipits of incipits (and with differences between them to boot — are they incipits of the same root text for Albright or not?)! There is no evidence whatsoever that the Ark Saying in Num 10v35 was any longer or shorter than that text itself tells us. Albright is on stronger ground with Num 21v17, but this is his only remaining example and is alone insufficient to demonstrate any general technique of poetic abbreviation and identification. Evidence for Albright's incipit theory, much less a *collection* of such incipits, looks remarkably thin in the Hebrew Bible.

- Even if Albright were correct, is it probable that a collection of incipits would be placed in the middle of a collection of more unified compositions which we call the Psalter? What use is such a piece as the 68<sup>th</sup> composition in a set of 150 others which are, on Albright's understanding, of such a different genre? Such a phenomenon would perhaps be best accounted for as an accident: the editors of the Psalter mistook the catalogue as a unified composition. This possibility occurs to Albright himself, though he does not explore its likelihood: "It is perfectly possible that the editor in question failed to recognize that he was dealing with a catalogue." (p9). The possibility must indeed be granted, but is it likely that so gross a misidentification would have occurred, especially given the recent evidence of editorial perspicacity and ingenuity underlying the composition of the Psalter?<sup>211</sup> If the poem is so disparate as to justify a theory as drastic as Albright's, is it likely that an editor would have mistaken the piece as a meaningful, unified whole?
- Finally, Albright's view provides no explanation of the real and fascinating connections and the overall literary structure which can be discerned between the various parts of the Psalm. These links are too insistent and too strong to be explained away as fortuitous, or to be dismissed as the product of an over-indulgent exegetical imagination. Yet this is the

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Harvard UP, 1973), p103.

<sup>211</sup> For a review see M.A. Vincent, "The Shape of the Psalter: an Eschatological Dimension?" in P.J. Harland and C.T.R. Hayward (eds.), *New Heaven & New Earth. Prophecy & the Millennium* (A. Gelston FS; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), p61-82. The best study is still G.H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985).



only explanation to which we may have recourse on Albright's view. The connections must be seen merely as an illusion or a fluke. For me this is completely inadequate.<sup>212</sup>

In the light of these points and the considerable evidence of unifying threads within the poem, Albright's theory appears to have little to commend it. The same goes for other theories, including Robinson's, which seek to deny any but fortuitous links between the various sources of Psalm 68 — which claim, in other words, that the juxtaposition of materials within Psalm 68 is accidental in terms of content, and is to be explained only by virtue of the historical need to preserve materials and the convenience of doing so by joining them into a composite text.

### The Union of Two or More Original Compositions

The points just made mean that the view of Moses Bittenwieser can be dealt with relatively quickly. His theory is less radical than Robinson and Albright in that the Psalm is thought to be made up of two compositions rather than 18 or 30. But the same fundamental weakness of failure to explain the unifying features of the Psalm and its presence within the Psalter as a unity is characteristic.

Bittenwieser suggested that our present Psalm 68 was formed by the amalgam of two originally quite separate compositions, as follows:

68A	2-7, 19c, 20-24, 29-36
68B	8-9, 16-18, 12-13, 14b, 15, 19a-b, 25-28, 14a <sup>213</sup>

He proposed that strong links were to be found between 68A and Deutero-Isaiah, and he identified 68B as a victory song of Deborah and Barak over Sisera (a variation on Jud 5). He went further by equating the authors of 68B and Jud 5, suggesting that 68A was an early composition of Deutero-Isaiah's before his genius had fully blossomed! 68B is a triumphant celebration of victory characterised by parataxis and unusual words and word combinations. 68A describes the people languishing in captivity; the pervasive mood is one of gloom, and the linguistic features of 68B are absent here. Bittenwieser is to be commended for attempting to differentiate between the two compositions in this way, even if his arguments (stylistic and thematic) are not convincing.

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<sup>212</sup> This argument cannot be invoked if it is claimed that disparate materials were brought together because of their relevance to a common theme or a single cultic occasion.

<sup>213</sup> It will be noted that v10,11 are missing here. These were thought to be a misplaced part of Psalm 65, an incantation for rain.



What Battenwieser did not explain was how the various elements of 68B should have become so hopelessly disordered, nor why, indeed, someone should have bothered to merge the two texts so that they be included in the Psalter. It cannot be emphasised too strongly how basic this omission is. If the two underlying texts are so different, why should anyone wish to join them together? It makes no sense, and Battenwieser has no help to offer.

For this reason, proposals such as that of Hans Schmidt<sup>214</sup> are much more satisfying. He takes us back into the world of Robinson and Albright in that he saw Psalm 68 as consisting of 16 separate songs with different origins. But his theory is not plagued by a great weakness of the other three because it includes an explanation of why the Psalm should have reached its present form. On Schmidt's view the source compositions are collected together and unified because they were used at the same event: an enthronement festival, as depicted in v25,26:

“Unser Psalm, der also eigentlich ein ganzes kleines Textbuch für das Fest der Thronfahrt genannt werden könnte, enthält nicht weniger als 16. Es ist / (Lieder) selbstverständlich, dass diese Lieder nicht alle eigens für den kultischen Vorgang gedichtet, sondern sehr verschiedenen Ursprungs, auch verschiedenen Inhalts sind.”<sup>215</sup>

I am not particularly interested in Schmidt's theory above others because of his particular breakdown of Psalm 68, but rather single it out because of the explanatory power it has (even if wrong) over against the other theories I have considered. At least Schmidt provides a cogent reason why the Psalm should have ended up in our possession in the form in which it has. Once this crucial advantage has been observed we can proceed into an analysis of the compositional history of the Psalm which nevertheless always has its eye on the unified final product which has resulted.

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<sup>214</sup> H. Schmidt, *Die Psalmen* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1934), p127-128.

<sup>215</sup> H. Schmidt, *Die Psalmen*, p128.

## 5.3. Compositional History

Discussion of the compositional history of Psalm 68 needs to be undertaken with considerable caution, and I begin this section with a demonstration of this and a statement of the provisional and hypothetical nature of all theories. With this Psalm in particular it is essential to take into account its heavy use of intertextual echo in any reconstruction of literary history. Having sketched out a broad theory of the Psalm's composition I then examine some specific possibilities of editorial activity within it. This is followed by a concluding section which re-emphasises the reasons for taking seriously the present unity of the Psalm whatever its pre-history might have been.

### *Problems of Compositional Analysis*

Thus far I have argued against those understandings of Psalm 68 which do not take seriously its present unity or try to account for its presence in the Psalter as a single composition. But the process of composition has not yet been examined. As outlined earlier, it would be possible, though perhaps unlikely, that a single writer or group wrote the poem from start to finish, trading in allusions to other works, conscious and subconscious, with only relatively minor editorial activity taking place at a later date. An alternative would be to postulate the existence of a number of preexisting texts which have been merged together (possibly with specially written new material).

The difficulty is to decide between these, and, if the second be accepted, to choose any *particular* theory of development over any other. There are so many potential variables to the second option (number of 'original' texts, extent of specially written material, possibility of further additions and redactional layers) that there simply cannot be enough evidence in the 200 words of the Psalm to single out one particular decision on these matters as being demonstrably superior to others.

The disparate nature of the contents of Psalm 68 has already been commented upon. The practical consequence of this feature is that the text can be fractured in any number of places: it can be claimed to consist of any number of constituent parts, as the scholarly literature of the modern period has clearly demonstrated. Changes of subject, speaker, grammatical person, and so on are so frequent, that to carve up the text into individual units and claim they were originally independent pieces is the easiest of tasks.

But there is a sting in the tail of this. For the Psalm can be broken up in so many different ways that it has not been possible to attain any uniformity amongst those scholars who accept the disunity of the Psalm. The only conclusion which has been reached with any consistency is that the Psalm is disparate in its content. Ask the next question of precisely where the fractures are and the unanimity disappears. This does not disprove the first conclusion, but it casts doubts on whether we can reliably discuss the second.

The very theories considered in the previous section illustrate this point, for there is scarcely any unanimity in determining how the Psalm should be broken down into its constituent parts amongst the four scholars whose work was considered. Albright and Robinson agree in their delimitations of individual fragments in only 5 instances; Albright and Schmidt agree in only 4 instances. Robinson and Schmidt fare a little better by agreeing in their identification of fragments on 9 occasions, but all three (Albright, Robinson and Schmidt) are in accord only twice! This must raise very serious doubts whether it is possible to identify fragments of 'original compositions' with any certainty on empirical grounds. The lack of unanimity does not prove these approaches to be wrong; it certainly does not demonstrate that the Psalm must therefore have been a unified composition. But it does cast doubt on the question of whether sufficient empirical evidence is available to reconstruct accurately and precisely the pre-history of Psalm 68 in its present form. It raises serious questions about whether we can have access to a reliable understanding of the pre-history of the Psalm.

The difficulty comes in arguing for any one compositional theory over another (and further, given the obvious lack of sufficient clear evidence, the tedious nature of any attempt to demonstrate the superiority or inadequacy of particular theories: there is too little that one can say with certainty to enable one to put together a worthwhile hypothesis). In practice, scholars have not bothered to make the attempt. They have simply stated that the Psalm consists of, say,  $x$  original compositions, probably brought together at a period  $y$ , and so on. But this is little more than an opinion, and an opinion which, as results have shown, few other scholars would agree with.

I am arguing that although it is quite reasonable to believe that a number of pre-existing texts were edited together or subsumed within the framework of another text perhaps newly composed, any claim that one can go further than this and precisely identify the 'original' texts involved and the time of their merging must be treated with scepticism. Instead, I suggest that looking in the direction of intertextuality to try to understand the composition of Psalm 68 is more helpful.



## ***Intertextual Borrowing and Composition***

Two findings of this study so far are particularly helpful in attempting to construct a simple model of the composition of Psalm 68. These are:

1. The evidence of an overarching structure to the Psalm (inclusion, central section, first half paralleling second half), and the presence of themes and motifs which permeate its parts.
2. The literary technique of intertextual borrowing and allusion which is pervasive throughout.

### **A Simple Model of Composition**

The first of these two points makes it likely that the basic framework of the Psalm (and thus its 'message' as a final composition) was put together at one particular time by a single author or group (this is the most straightforward way of accounting for the Psalm's structural and literary features). It is quite possible that insertions and additions were made after this. I propose merely that the basic structural framework was put together in one go.

Point two above enables us to understand how this basic structure may have been developed into a Psalm both when the Psalm took shape as a composition which somewhat resembled its present form, and how it may subsequently have received further development. Once the framework of the text is there and a basic technique of alluding to traditions and texts in the reader's consciousness has been established, it is an easy matter for later editors to 'hang' further intertextual connections onto the framework.

Point two also explains the literary bumpiness and parataxis of the Psalm. Any text which pulls in as many quotations, allusions and echoes as Psalm 68 does in its short compass will of necessity read this way. Portions of Psalm 68 are indeed drawn from earlier texts creating an unevenness and even a sense of bewilderment for the reader. But the reasons for these borrowings and allusions have already been seen, and this technique of subsuming portions of other texts or allusions to them in a new framework is not the same as taking two texts, say, and fusing them together to make a new one (this latter is what is implied by most theories of disunity for Psalm 68). In other words, Psalm 68, in something close to the form in which we now have it, is the master of the texts it quotes and uses. It is in control, marshalling them for its own ends by its allusive technique; it is not the product of a merger of equals. The source materials which the Psalm uses are brought together deliberately to be subordinated to an overall thematic development which the 'writer' wished to create; they are

brought to serve a theological agenda or for their mutual relevance to a particular occasion, not simply because the writer found some scraps of poetry and thought they might fit together and be kept more conveniently that way.<sup>216</sup>

The proposal is simplest if we assume that the majority of the intertextual 'fleshing out' of the basic poem was done at the point of its creation. This is particularly true in the case of connections with Jud 5, the text to which Psalm 68 doffs its cap most frequently. These allusions are so pervasive throughout Psalm 68, so woven into its fabric, that it is easiest to understand them as being incorporated as part of its original writing. Many of the other allusions may well have been incorporated at this time also, although this, and its alternatives, is undemonstrable.

It is likely that those parts of the Psalm which are most taxing for the interpreter and which might shout 'interpolation' or 'secondary addition' most loudly to the traditional historical critic (v7,14,15,23,31 etc) are also to be understood as allusions to texts (whether written or otherwise) which we no longer possess. The allusions that have been found to so many texts and events within the Hebrew Bible make this an almost mandatory assumption. Once this technique of using different source materials has been appreciated it is impossible to use the argument that some parts of the Psalm fit ill with others in terms of chronology or linguistic features and must therefore be regarded as 'non-original'. This would be a failure to understand the way in which Psalm 68 operates.

Once the composition of the bulk of Psalm 68 is understood as a structure or skeleton with a particular job to do, fleshed out with allusions to Jud 5 and other texts both within the Hebrew Bible and outside, and once the probability be recognised that this includes allusions whose sources we do not possess, then there is little else that causes major problems with respect to its compositional history. We must briefly consider some alternatives, however.

## Alternative Models

It is not difficult to think of alternative reconstructions which would also be plausible. But the proposal just outlined has the attraction of accounting for the two observations which opened this section very adequately, without involving extra layers of complexity whose necessity would be difficult to prove. I give two examples.

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<sup>216</sup> A literary patchwork 'accidentally' displaying unity and theological agenda of the kind my analysis has shown would be a most unusual composition. The 'writer' of Psalm 68 in its present form must be regarded as the master of the materials on which he draws.



It would be possible to see the allusions to the Song of Deborah in Psalm 68 as an additional redactional layer added to a more 'original' text. But although this is a quite conceivable possibility, it leaves unexplained Psalm 68's many connections to *other* texts. How are these to be explained? Are we to posit redactionary layers for each of these, or is it simpler to say that this collaging technique of deliberate allusion is part of the very fabric of the Psalm? We can say this whilst still admitting the possibility that later editors may have subsequently added *further* to this intertextual collage, but that it is difficult now to say with any certainty which parts these may have been, or indeed whether any such process took place at all.

A more drastic understanding would be to argue that the second half of the Psalm (v20+) with its more violent imagery and its references to festal processions and the temple at Jerusalem finds no counterpart in the first and is secondary. Psalm 68v1-19 might stand with relatively little modification as a war ballad culminating in God's triumph and an ascent to a sanctuary (who knows which? it need not be the central one, even if it existed at this point). The editors who added to the Psalm by making it suitable for particular centralised cultic processions might reasonably have woven into their work a similar set of allusions to those found in the first half.

Once again, one cannot prove such a theory or many others like it to be wrong; *but neither can one bring forward evidence which requires such a view*. Again, the structural neatness of the Psalm in its final form and the pervasive technique of allusion across it<sup>217</sup> are such that although the possibility of the reconstruction just considered must be admitted, there is no particular evidence for it; and so the simpler theory is the better model.

### ***Editorial Activity***

The foregoing is in no way intended to imply that the Psalm has received no modification since its original creation, or that closer examination of particular parts may not yield illumination on compositional history. In this section I want to examine two areas in which I think compositional or redactional activity may be witnessed.

#### **Glosses and Editorial Substitutions and Additions**

The material is best presented as a list, with discussion accompanying each of the points.

- זֶה סִינַי in v9 may be a scribal gloss intended to identify the incident being described in the verse. Fishbane, for instance, assumes this as a matter of course. With others I prefer



to take this phrase as integral part of the structure of the verse, to be construed as 'the One of Sinai' or 'Lord of Sinai'. The phrase can be taken either way, and I am happy to admit that it may be a gloss.

- It is a conventional and uncontroversial assumption that the many occurrences of אלהים are in some cases editorial replacements for other terms, in particular the tetragram. Deciding which of these are original and which are editorial is no longer possible however. I have presented evidence that the placements of YHWH in the present form of the text are deliberate, but this does not exclude the probability of previous stages of redaction.
- The reference to the temple at Jerusalem in v30 may be secondary, harmonising the Psalm with the centralised picture of worship and the Davidic history. There are no corresponding references to the temple elsewhere in the Psalm, and the absence of an identification of God's mountain in v16-19 leaves open the possibility that originally a different sanctuary was intended.
- The whole section describing the tribal procession in v26-29 may be omitted with no real loss to the overall shape and meaning of the Psalm. This could be a later addition adapting the Psalm for cultic use.
- The references to God's sanctuary (if this is the correct translation) throughout the Psalm are not strictly necessary. They may be regarded as additions intended to make an original war ballad more suitable for religious use.

None of these are revolutionary, neither are they controversial: *nor are they particularly interesting or illuminating*. One could continue to list such possibilities for some time, but to no great exegetical benefit in my opinion. Doubtless some redactional activities along these and similar lines did take place. But the assumption of any one or other of them does not solve any particular problem or crux in Psalm 68, or enable us to say something illuminating about it which could not have been said without such a proposal. For this reason I am content to leave the discussion there, upon observing one final point. It is important to notice that one would assume several of these changes not because anything in the text requires it, but in order to conform the text to some pre-existing theory of origins or religious development in Israel. Scholarly constructs outside the text (which may very well be correct) are being placed upon it in order to presume a more original form.

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<sup>217</sup> The Jud 5 allusions, for instance, cover the whole Psalm, not just the first part.

## Longer Insertions and Additions

There are a number of verses in the Psalm which appear to create a disjunction or a difficulty of interpretation which would be resolved if the verse in question were removed. A better or more natural flow of thought would result, and certain key word links would emerge between verses which would become adjacent. I present some of the possibilities, with the more likely examples at the beginning.

1. Omit v14 since it breaks up v13 and 15: verses 13 and 15 both refer to the scattering or fleeing of kings. The highly obscure v14 makes this connection less obvious, and breaks the flow of ideas. Assuming that v14 is indeed providing more details concerning the spoils, it has no doubt been added as explanatory of the last phrase of v13: 'the beauty of the house will divide the *spoil*.' While v14 gives more detail about this spoil and its division, its addition obscures the motif of the fleeing kings which would otherwise have been more clear.
2. Omit v23 as breaking up verses 22 and 24: Verses 22 and 24 are connected by the idea of God's victory over his enemies and their utter subjection both to him and to his people. Further, v22 mentions God breaking the *head* of his enemies, and v24 invites his people to wash their *feet* in the enemies blood; the enemies' heads are being trampled under foot. This is lost by the addition of v23 in which God says: 'I will cause to return from Bashan, I will cause to return from the depths of the sea.' This is an obscure verse; the text would flow more smoothly without it.
3. Omit v18 as breaking up verses 17 and 19: There are two connections between verses 17 and 19. The first is the mention of many peaked mountains and the mountain God has chosen to rest in, which can be compared with the idea of God ascending on high in v19. Second, and more important, v17 speaks of God dwelling in this mountain for ever (using the term YHWH). v19 refers to the dwelling of יהוה אלהים in the same place.<sup>218</sup> This link is lost by the imposition of v18 concerning the chariots of God. The verse may have been added because of its mention of Sinai.
4. Omit v31 as breaking up verses 30 and 32: v30 and 32 are linked by the theme of nations coming to God. v30 describes kings bringing gifts to his temple at Jerusalem; v32 refers to envoys coming out of Egypt, and even far away Ethiopia recognising his sway. This connection is lessened by the insertion of the monumentally obscure v31 concerning the

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<sup>218</sup> Even if one reads 'so the rebellious might dwell, O God Yah', the motif of dwelling still links the verses; both God and the rebellious can dwell together.



beast of the reeds. One can understand why the verse may have been added since it mentions people submitting themselves with pieces of silver. Nevertheless it introduces a complexity of imagery which is otherwise absent in this part of the poem and which thus suggests that it is secondary. Further, v31 refers to the scattering of people who delight in battles, whereas the main motif of v30 and 32 is people from distant parts of the world coming together to God (the very opposite of scattering).

5. As a very tentative option, one could omit v27 as breaking up verses 26 and 28: Verses 26 and 28 are clearly linked by the procession theme. v26 encourages the princes and the muscians and the young women to engage actively in the procession; v28 lists these princes who are told to go before in v26 (Benjamin and the princes of Judah, Zebulun and Naphtali). Into this v27 appears to be inserted: 'In the assembly bless God, the Lord the fountain of Israel.' The mention of the assembly/choir certainly fits the context of processional worship and ritual, and the presence of the verse binds together the closing section of the Psalm with its additional occurrence of the root בָּרַךְ. Nevertheless the passage flows better with v27 omitted.

Several of these appear to be good candidates for illustrating how the compositional process might have taken place. Omissions 1,3 and 5 all enable the text to read that bit more smoothly, perhaps suggesting that they may originally have been composed that way. One can also see motivation for the additions, and can understand that these might reasonably have been made at a later date.

The remaining examples, 2 and 4, have already arisen in earlier discussion. These both belong to passages in which it appears that two sets of verses with clear thematic flow have been spliced together in an interlocking pattern. The motivation for such a technique may be to illustrate two aspects of a subject (for instance, a passage about the destruction of the wicked might be spliced with another showing the celebrations of the righteous). This splicing thus serves a literary function. Of course it can be argued that both passages were written this way in the first place (as interlocking constructions created from scratch). One cannot refute such a view. It seems more reasonable, however, to assume that one text has been spliced with another which either pre-existed or was created bespoke for the Psalm.

### ***Conclusion: Psalm 68 as a Unity***

In short, there appears to be evidence of editorial activity within Psalm 68, as there is in many texts of the Hebrew Bible. However, the extent to which this can be unambiguously



discerned and 'original' forms retrieved has been seriously exaggerated by a previous generation of scholarship.

In contrast to the hypothetical nature of many of the conclusions regarding editorial seams within the Psalm, there is a considerable body of evidence, presented within the earlier parts of this dissertation, that the Psalm makes sense as a unified composition, and that there are literary techniques which operate right across it at that level. These are such that for practical purposes the text is best regarded as basically a unity.

But it is a special sort of unity, for it is a unity which is made up of allusion to and borrowing from a plethora of other source texts. In this sense the Psalm is like a patchwork, but a patchwork which had a designer masterminding its construction. These sources are not marshalled randomly or without alteration for the mere purpose of preserving antique texts. They are subsumed under a grand scheme, for they become part of a Psalm which has a message and a goal.

## 6. IMPLIED AUDIENCE

I now attempt to put together a profile of the implied readership of the Psalm from an analysis of its content, carefully working through the Psalm asking “What kind of person would read and use such a composition? What kind of belief system and ideological assumptions would they hold? If Psalm 68 is a product, who would have consumed it?”

I am speaking here not of subsequent generations of readers. For many of them, Psalm 68 would be studied and used simply because the text had secured a place in the canon, or because some editors had chosen to include it in an earlier collection of Psalms.<sup>219</sup> I am assuming that Psalm 68 existed in something close to its present form as a composition before being incorporated into the Elohistic Psalter, book 2, or the Psalter as a whole. This is not a necessary assumption: the editors who placed the text into their collection *could* have created it themselves as an amalgam of pre-existing materials. But it is a likely assumption, and such creative editors would most likely have had an audience in mind themselves in any case.

We may begin with some rather obvious points which are nevertheless important. Psalm 68 assumes an audience who:

- Is enjoying a period of relative success and prosperity (witness the triumphant mood of the Psalm which contrasts starkly with the laments elsewhere, and the emphasis on strength and power and God’s favour on Israel at the end).<sup>220</sup>
- Has (quite recently?) celebrated military/political victories which it ascribes to God or claims is indicative of his support and approval (hence the optimism of the previous

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<sup>219</sup> Even if Psalm 68 had no particular function in the cult, was not already a popular piece, or had no particularly obvious message which rendered its inclusion mandatory, it is not difficult to see why editors would have selected it. Its grand style, its archaic features, its celebration of the names, power and acts of God, not to mention its multiplicity of references to other esteemed texts — all these would have guaranteed its inclusion.

<sup>220</sup> One could argue that this optimism is a projection of what the community would *like* to feel rather than a reflection of reality: perhaps the Psalm is an appeal for God’s rescue, a longing for eschatological salvation. While this is possible (and indeed, the evidence behind a number of my following bullet points could similarly be turned around and conceived in another way), what I am interested in here is to draw the simplest and most natural implication from the text. To claim that the (obvious) joyous mood is really masking present suffering, while possible, is to introduce unnecessary complication. We have plenty of examples of Psalms which were written to deal with down-times in Israel’s history. This Psalm is from a different world, and it makes sense to assume a time of success for this composition.

point; consider the implications of v25: the Exodus itself seems too remote to be in mind for such a vigorous passage). This is not the full story, however, for the community also...

- Still has enemies which are also identified as *God's* enemies (v2,22-24 etc). The Psalm revels in military imagery and longs for further conquests, the destruction of all its enemies, and the attainment of a position at the head of the nations.<sup>221</sup> There is a definite international vision: God's activities carry worldwide significance and all nations will come to him; his conquest will be universal. But this is to Israel's glorification as much as God's: they bask in their prominent role and parade before the nations who are but the audience, the witnesses, of Israel's glory. Tribute is brought to God, certainly, but does this mean anything more than 'to Israel'?
- Needs or wishes incitement to praise God vociferously, most probably in accompaniment of a particular cultic occasion such as a national celebration and procession. There is sufficient emphasis on this to assume that the Psalm once functioned as a liturgy or was written for a formal celebration of a particular victory connected with God's ascent of a mountain (v16-19).<sup>222</sup>
- Wishes or is willing to receive moralising exhortation about the righteous and the wicked and their respective fates. The Psalm is implicitly passing on the message: 'you had better be good, or else!'
- Has a great respect for tradition, valuing earlier texts such as Jud 5 which are alluded to frequently, not to mention the incidents in their national 'history' to which copious reference is made. The audience would admire and enjoy the Psalm's constant trading in these allusions, its reworking of old songs and stories, and its use of traditional names for God and archaic or unusual vocabulary.<sup>223</sup>
- Tolerates and even enjoys violent and destructive language to characterise the activities of God.

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<sup>221</sup> Parts of the Psalm seem to be intended to mobilise God to carry out this conquest. v26-29 say, implicitly, 'we are praising you as we should in our cultic procession; now muster your power for us, as you have promised!'

<sup>222</sup> The imagery here seems too strong, too concrete, to be interpreted as a metaphor. A theory which could link the military victory of point 2 above with this mountain theme would provide a particularly strong account of the occasion of the Psalm. See p252, 174-177.

<sup>223</sup> Compare v21 which strives to make old language of salvation and 'coming out' relevant anew — or it may celebrate a recent 'escape from death' in language which recalls the past.



- Wants to recall and evoke God as an active, vigorous character, one who appears in swashbuckling style in theophany and earthquake, the God of the Exodus (v8,18,19), one who is present among them to act on their behalf. Or again, perhaps the community needs to have these memories reinvoked or restated because it is losing its connection to them and is inclined to feel that God is more distant, that the glory days are over. In this respect the agenda of the Psalm may be more subversive than it first appears. For it may be a loaded piece encouraging its hearers back to traditions which have since been weakened or lost. A recent victory (see points 1 and 2 above) might be the perfect opportunity for religious revival, a perfect excuse to argue that God is still present and must be worshipped in the traditional ways, though some may have begun to doubt it.

The Psalm assumes an audience which either assented to these points already, or else was capable of being persuaded by them at the hand of evocative poetry. The poet or group which produced Psalm 68 either believed it could persuade its audience by virtue of the power and grandeur of the poetry, or the piece was commissioned by an authority figure/patron, perhaps for a specific cultic occasion. In either of these cases people would *have* to listen and the poet would have his opportunity to persuade.

Many of the foregoing points are fairly incontrovertible but equally do not help immensely in picking out any one particular audience at a precise point in Israel's history (points 3,5,6 would be relevant to any number of hypothetical audiences during Israel's history, and the remaining points do not help us to be a great deal more precise). There are also a number of other hints which allow some further tentative proposals.

- The references to women in v12-13 and v26-29 suggest that they form an important segment of the audience, and that, if a cultic occasion is to be envisioned, they probably had a central role.
- If v13-14 are read as a rebuke then this part of the Psalm encourages solidarity with God's cause (really the Psalmist's cause!) on the part of the audience. The audience is encouraged to involvement and cooperation with the Psalmist's agenda.
- v16-19 can be read in two ways with respect to implied audience. They either imply that some (perhaps worshippers from other sanctuaries) were uncertain of Zion's significance and dominance and needed to be convinced by propaganda such as this. Or, they illustrate a community who enjoyed knocking other contenders who might claim the location of the divine mountain and seat. Perhaps there was a certain self-consciousness

about the apparent insignificance of Zion which poetry such as this betrays even as it tries to combat it.

The attempt to identify a suitable cultic occasion and a 'historical' period which would match some of these criteria will be made elsewhere (p244-250 and p252 respectively). For the present, the very articulation of the ideology and assumptions of the Psalm and the attempt to project this onto an imagined audience is a valuable process. It is instructive to ask how audiences today might correlate with these assumptions and what adjustments have to be made in order to adopt the Psalm.

## 7. DATING PSALM 68

A bewildering array of dates has been advocated for the composition of Psalm 68, often with grossly inadequate argumentation.<sup>224</sup> My discussion builds on the earlier section on compositional history by searching for one primary date of composition rather than dating several alleged layers or individual compositions within the Psalm. The topic is complicated by the current uncertainty concerning the biblical accounts dealing with the pre-exilic period, and also the dating of the major literary strata within the Hebrew Bible. As far as linguistic/stylistic evidence is concerned, the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets represent one of the surest anchors for absolute dating of particular texts. Beyond this it is perhaps necessary to focus on dating poetic texts relative to one another rather than in an absolute way — at least from a *linguistic* point of view.

I begin by outlining some general principles and methods by which texts may be dated, before proceeding to apply these to Psalm 68.

### 7.1. Criteria for Dating Hebrew Poetry

I suggest that there are three types of evidence which may be used in dating Hebrew poetry:

1. Linguistic and orthographic evidence.
2. Allusions to or quotations of other texts whose date may be able to be approximated with greater certainty. The text in hand may also be quoted by other texts whose date is known. A text may also have genre and style parallels with texts which seem to originate from a particular period.
3. Content of the text — ‘historical’ references and implied circumstances of composition.

I shall discuss the potential and limitations of each of these in turn.

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<sup>224</sup> One exception is A. Caquot, “Le psaume 68” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 177 (1970), p147-182. J.J.S. Perowne, *Book of Psalms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol.1 (London: Bell & Daldy, 1870) is also helpful among older commentators.



## ***Linguistic and Orthographic Evidence***

I review the types of evidence that may be used, examine the phenomenon of archaizing in which more recent poetry mimics age, and make some cautionary comments about over-confident use of linguistic evidence.

### **Linguistic Criteria**

Linguistic evidence for dating texts works on the assumption that we can model the development of the Hebrew language through the biblical period. There are several important studies of the development of the Hebrew language, but D.A. Robertson's study of 1974, working on lines broadly established by the Albright school, remains the most thorough and compelling presentation of the specific topic of dating. It is significant that Robertson is both more detailed and more cautious than his predecessors. This study assumes that early Hebrew shared certain features with Ugaritic which gradually fell out of use in subsequent Hebrew. It also utilises the eighth century prophets as a source of 'absolute' dating according to which other poetic texts may be dated in a relative manner.

Robertson reconstructs early (13th-10th poetic Hebrew) on the basis of two criteria, stressing that neither of them is sufficient in itself. The first is the assumption that rare grammatical features of biblical poetry may be indicative of early poetry (other explanations can be given, such that a rare form simply did not happen to occur in the biblical corpus even though it was in common use in later times, therefore caution is necessary) and second, by comparing Ugaritic poetry and the Amarna glosses. The assumption is that a rare form in biblical poetry which is present in one or both of these sources was once common in early poetic Hebrew.<sup>225</sup>

There are broadly speaking three kinds of linguistic criteria which may be used to date Hebrew poetry: first, orthographic conventions (on the assumption that scribal practice was generally conservative in such a way as to preserve such features); second, lexical choice — the use of a certain word which has since fallen out of use may betray a text's age, for example, or meanings which seem to be more consonant with Mishnaic rather than biblical Hebrew may suggest a later date; third, grammatical forms and syntactic features of a text may be indicative of age.

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<sup>225</sup> D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (SBLDS 3; Missoula MT: Scholars, 1972), p4,5.

Without providing a detailed review of Robertson's thesis and the work of other scholars in the area, the following list illustrates the kind of linguistic clues which have been suggested to be relevant in the matter of dating.

- Albright suggested that climactic parallelism (also known as staircase or repetitive parallelism) was an indication of an early date.<sup>226</sup> This phenomenon is frequent in Ugaritic poetry, and also in several biblical texts which allege age (such as Jud 5).
- Albright's proposal concerning parallelism was coupled with the claim that Ugaritic shows less frequent use of paranomasia, and that this feature is hence characteristic of later Hebrew poetry. Albright does not specify precisely what he means by the term paranomasia, however, and most biblical poetic texts employ word-play of one sort or another.
- Freedman and Foley's work on prose particles (articles,  $\aleph$ , and the object marker  $\aleph$ ) in biblical Hebrew raises a number of interesting conclusions. As well as being useful in distinguishing between poetry and prose material, it seems that later poetic texts tend to use prose particles much more frequently than texts which are generally regarded as early.<sup>227</sup>
- Albright, Freedman and Cross have contributed extensively to a theory of the orthography of early Hebrew. In the earlier stages of the language defective spelling was the norm with respect to vowels. Copious instances of defective spelling in a text may be indicative of an earlier date.
- For Robertson one of the most powerful and systematic ways of distinguishing early poetry is through the use of verbal forms. The proposal is that perfect and imperfect (without waw) forms were used indiscriminately in past narrative in early Hebrew poetry; the waw imperfect forms were used only when the meaning of "and" is required. In contrast, in standard poetic Hebrew the imperfect is not normally used for past narration, and the waw imperfect is not determined by the appropriateness of "and" and is more

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<sup>226</sup> F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Grand Rapids/Livonia: Eerdmans/Dove, 1997; orig. 1975 SBLDS), p7. Albright's views on dating are set out in *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York: Doubleday, 1968). There are a number of inconsistencies in Albright's approach. For instance, he dates the oracles of Baalam earlier than the song of Deborah because of historical references in them, even though the stylistic criteria demanded an earlier date for the song. Those parts of the oracles that Albright thought should be dated early (Num 24v20-24) may not be integral to the oracles as a whole in any case. Again, Albright dates Ps 29 late despite its heavy use of repetitive parallelism. On the basis of his criteria it ought to appear higher in the list than it does.



often initial than medial. It is a fully independent verbal form with a past narrative function. Some texts (of an intermediate date) reflect both tendencies. One of the difficulties of this method is that it involves being able to find passages of texts which are past narrative. If no such passages exist the test fails.<sup>228</sup>

- Certain morphological forms recognised in MT and found in Ugaritic or the Amarna glosses are argued by Robertson to be characteristic of early poetry. Examples include -*mw* as a third masculine plural co-nominal suffix, *z* as a relative pronoun, a *y* (long 'i') attached to a noun or participle.<sup>229</sup> Another group of morphological forms is not recognised in MT pointing, but traces of them may be discerned nevertheless.<sup>230</sup>
- Freedman has suggested that usage of divine names gives an indication of date, although there are problems with his analysis.<sup>231</sup>
- With respect to vocabulary, usages which have close Ugaritic parallels rather than internal biblical Hebrew counterparts or meanings may be thought to be indicative of age, particularly if a number of such instances appear in a single text. Conversely, Persian or Aramaic terms or usages, or usages which have more in common with later, perhaps Rabbinic, Hebrew, may be indicative of later texts.
- An accumulation of rare or unique words within a text may suggest an early date.

These points vary in the extent to which they convince (most of them are controvertible or have been disputed in some way), and none of them is sufficient of itself. There may be other explanations for these phenomena, such as the idiolect of a particular author or the stylistic traits of a certain group or type of literature (compare the points below). Nevertheless,

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<sup>227</sup> D.N. Freedman and W. Foley, "Another Look at Biblical Hebrew Poetry" in E.R. Follis (ed.) *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTS 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p11-28.

<sup>228</sup> Robertson concludes that the following texts are to be dated towards the early pole (13th century): Ex 15, Jud 5, Hab 3, 2 Sam 22 = Ps 18, Deut 32, Job, and possibly (more dubiously because they are shorter texts) Ps 81, 104. The following are examples of standard poetry: Ps 78, 105, 106 and also some shorter passages: Gen 49, Deut 33, Ps 40. The following cases are equivocal; 2 Sam 1v19-27, Ps 24, 30, 32, 44, 66, 74, 77, 80, 95, 99, 114, 116, 138, 139; Prov 8; Ps 3v1-4; 4v3-7.

<sup>229</sup> For the complete list, see D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, p57-110.

<sup>230</sup> For details, see D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, p112-133. In practice, few of these affect our discussion of Psalm 68.

<sup>231</sup> D.N. Freedman, "Divine Names and Titles in Early Hebrew Poetry", in D.N. Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy – Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p77-129. The use of divine names is more complicated than Freedman's scheme would imply. This is partly recognised in the detailed discussion he gives of each of the texts in his corpus, but the major problem is the extent of that corpus. There are many texts which all would take to be later which only use the name YHWH (yet which should be dated early under his scheme). Freedman's observations may be consistent within the corpus of data that he has chosen, but evidence from other texts is not included in his study.



linguistic evidence may be used to support an argument of age if there is a sufficient array of data coming from the different categories listed above. This type of data should always be used in conjunction with other evidence.

## Some Limitations

The following are some factors which count against placing too strong an emphasis on linguistic criteria for dating. It is necessary to enumerate these since linguistic evidence can otherwise be mistakenly assumed to carry an objectivity and factuality which other forms of evidence do not.

1. A poem may 'pretend' to be old, even when it is not. So called 'archaising' poetry may utilise archaic language to give an impression of sombreness, authority and importance (compare the use of the archaic pronouns 'thee/thou' to convey reverence and authority which still persists in some Christian traditions today). Archaic language may be used as a rhetorical technique for ideological purposes, and may be particularly appropriate for cultic or ritual occasions. Although there are various ways which have been put forward to distinguish between real age and 'fake' age,<sup>232</sup> it is obviously true that if a text 'pretends' well enough it will not be possible to determine its age. There are certain question marks, however, about the extent to which archaising poetry was common in the ancient world.<sup>233</sup>
2. There is some circularity in the use of linguistic criteria which, while it cannot be avoided, must be borne in mind. Use of linguistic criteria to date texts is based on a theory of the history and development of the Hebrew language. There are, however, many gaps in the knowledge of this history. Although there is some epigraphic and inscriptional evidence to guide, most of the evidence for our picture of the development of Hebrew comes from the biblical texts themselves. Thus we adduce criteria from texts to develop a theory of the history of Hebrew, and that theory is then used to date further texts belonging to the same corpus.
3. The practical difficulties of using linguistic criteria are very apparent in the literature: scholars are able to come to widely differing conclusions from the same set of linguistic data. This has been amply illustrated recently in studies of the dating of Qoheleth. Two

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<sup>232</sup> See the discussion in D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*. The technique is to search for apparent indicators of age which are contradicted by the simultaneous presence of later forms.

<sup>233</sup> Compare L.A. Holford-Stevens, "Archaism in Latin", in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), p143.

recent studies by Schoors and Fredericks,<sup>234</sup> both extensive and high quality monographs dealing solely with this question, came to opposite conclusions from the same data. Even if Schoors' view be accepted over Fredericks' (the traditional consensus view), the point must be faced that Fredericks has shown that a convincing argument can be put the other way. The evidence is nowhere near as conclusive as is sometimes supposed.

4. The shorter a text, the smaller the corpus of data and the less certain linguistic evidence can be. To continue the previous example, there is far less evidence on which to build a conclusion in the case of a text like Psalm 68 than for a book like Qoheleth simply because Qoheleth contains far more data for analysis.
5. It is possible that archaic forms are not in fact such, but are rather dialectal variants. It is a well known philological fact that dialects are often conservative with respect to linguistic change, and may preserve archaic features. Our knowledge of ancient Hebrew dialectology is not substantial.
6. Writers may use unusual linguistic forms to achieve particular literary effects. Thus it is important to have an awareness of the literary dynamics of a text when interpreting the significance of linguistic data. It may also be possible that particular non-standard forms are used in order to conform a particular line of poetry to, say, metric constraints. However, since our understanding of these is very limited (Chapter 2.1, p77-83) too much emphasis must not be placed on this option.
7. Poetry is a particularly conservative linguistic medium, susceptible to non-standard archaic forms. This makes it harder to date poetic texts than narrative texts.

These points illustrate that although linguistic criteria may be very useful in an endeavour to date a text the conclusions to which they point can never be final.

### ***Allusion and Quotation***

If a particular genre of writing was characteristic of a particular period in ANE literature this may provide a clue for dating. However, the criterion of genre can only be used to suggest tentatively a general period or milieu for the composition of the Psalm. It cannot precisely determine when a Psalm must have been written and the possibility of innovation must

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<sup>234</sup> A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language Qoheleth* (Leuven: Peeters, 1992); D.C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating its Nature and Date* (Lewiston/Queenston: Mellon, 1988).

always be allowed. Considerable and close similarities to the Ugaritic texts may be indicative of a relatively early date.

The use of quotation and allusion can be helpful for positioning texts relative to one another, particularly so for Psalm 68 with its heavy use of other texts. The major difficulty of this approach is that it is not always possible to discern whether a text is quoting or is being quoted.

Delving rather more deeply into the reasons behind the use of allusion and quotation may yield insights into the historical period in which the Psalm was composed. If historical events and particular texts are quoted extensively, then there must be a reason for these references and appropriation. They must somehow be relevant to the historical situation of the Psalm's composition. There are exceptions even to this, however, such as the non-deliberate or subconscious echoing of language or the use of traditional typed expressions.

### ***Content of the Text***

Texts are usually written because they have relevance to a particular situation and audience. One of the most important ways of determining datings for texts is to discern the audience for whom the text would be relevant (implied audience) and the assumptions the text makes about the world of its time (economic, social and political conditions, for example).

Caution may be exercised here, however, since biblical texts have a tendency of drawing on previous 'history' and texts, and may carry typological meaning. The content of one particular text may be relevant to a number of different historical situations in Israel's history, and may speak legitimately to a number of different audiences. Indeed, this may be the very reason why the text is powerful and has lasting impact on cultural and religious history.

### ***Conclusion***

It becomes apparent from the discussion of these three elements that no single one of them is sufficient of itself in order to satisfactorily date a poetic text. Nevertheless, a combination of these criteria may well lead towards a particular date with some certainty.



## 7.2. Application of Criteria to Psalm 68

I first review some of the positions which have been taken on the date of Psalm 68 before my own examination.

### *Review of Previous Research*

A bewildering array of dates has been advocated for the composition of Psalm 68, from the time of Deborah to the time of Alexander Jannaeus. It would serve no valuable purpose to recount these various views in detail, but a brief attempt to characterise the diversity of opinion is worthwhile.<sup>235</sup>

Some scholars, such as Barnes, Cassuto, Dahood, Rogerson and McKay, and LePeau<sup>236</sup> have recognised the difficulty of the dating issue and refused to put forward a concrete suggestion of date at all. Battenwieser thought that part of the Psalm was composed by the author of Jud 5 to celebrate the victory over Sisera, and others like Eaton have similarly alleged a pre-monarchic core.<sup>237</sup> Some scholars have been content to assert that the Psalm probably dates from monarchic times (so Tournay), others refining further with the suggestion of 'early Monarchy' (so Eaton).<sup>238</sup>

Specific kings have been singled out. Kidner, Goulder, and Eerdmans all think of David (Eerdmans consenting that early Solomonic is also realistic).<sup>239</sup> The Psalm might relate specifically to the bringing of the ark to Zion (2 Sam 6), it might be a triumphal procession for a particular victory of David, or it may be a celebration of his victories in general.

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<sup>235</sup> Compare the summary table of A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Book of Psalms*, 1 vol. ed. (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*; Cambridge: CUP, 1906; orig. 1902), p375.

<sup>236</sup> W.E. Barnes, *Psalms*, vol 2 (*Westminster Commentaries*; London: Methuen, 1931); U. Cassuto, "Psalm LXVIII" in *Biblical and Oriental Studies* 1 (Jerusalem, 1973; orig. 1940), p241-284; M. Dahood, *Psalms 51-100* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1968); J.W. Rogerson and J.W. McKay, *Psalms 51-100* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977). In a counsel of despair, J.P. LePeau, *Psalm 68: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (unpublished PhD: University of Iowa, 1981) concludes that the lack of consensus regarding dating is indicative of the futility of a search for a date, and the lack of criteria. He judges that the evidence of the Psalm may fit more than one historical period.

<sup>237</sup> M. Battenwieser, *The Psalms: Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p40-42; J.H. Eaton, *Psalms* (*Torch Bible Commentaries*; London: SCM, 1967), p170.

<sup>238</sup> J.H. Eaton, *Psalms*, p170; R. Tournay, "Le Psaume LXVIII" *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942), p227-245; also *RB* 51 (1942), p227-245.

<sup>239</sup> D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (*Tyndale OT Commentaries*; Leicester: IVP, 1973); M.D. Goulder, "The Bitters of Victory (68)" in *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51-72* (JSOTS 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p191-216; B.D. Eerdmans, "Psalm LXVIII" *Expository Times* 46 (1934), p169-172.

Aisleitner,<sup>240</sup> Ortlund, Vlaaderingeboek and others have opted for Solomon (perhaps the translation of the ark to Solomon's temple), the victory of Jehoshaphat and Jehoram over Moab has also been cited, as has the reign of Hezekiah and the passing of the Assyrian threat.<sup>241</sup>

Next comes the possibility that the Psalm is Exilic and refers to the Return to Zion. In this vein, Kissane, Kirkpatrick and others date the Psalm to the end of the Exile or shortly after.<sup>242</sup> Then there are those who date the Psalm firmly in the Second Temple period. Podechard prefers the deliverance of Ptolemy Philadelphos in 320BCE, the period of the wars between Egypt and Syria over Palestine, while Wellhausen places it in or immediately after 167BCE,<sup>243</sup> Haupt subsequently pointing out that Wellhausen had meant to date it in 164!<sup>244</sup> The war between Ptolemy Philometor and Alexander Balas (146BCE; 1 Macc 11) has also been proposed, but in final place comes Duhm who thought the Psalm should be placed in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76BCE).

Some have tried to have the best of a number of these possible worlds by distinguishing layers of material. Beaucamp (1976), for instance, discerns a pre-Davidic nucleus which is reworked during the Monarchy, only for the whole Psalm to be rewritten after the Exile. Needless to say, with such an inclusive theory, any datum in the Psalm which appears to suit a particular date can easily be accounted for. However, on the basis of the argumentation in my section on compositional history, I am concerned to locate only one principal date here. Rather than argue negatively against these views I aim to examine the evidence and put forward one particular proposition.

### ***Linguistic and Orthographic Evidence***

There are a number of pieces of evidence which support the early dating of Psalm 68 on linguistic grounds (that is, prior to the eighth century prophets). Each of these items of data might be capable of alternative explanation, as I try to indicate in the footnotes, but together they provide cumulative support of an early date relative to the other poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>240</sup> J. Aistleitner, "Zu Ps. 68" *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 (1931), p29-41, in ascribing the Psalm to Solomon's day, read עֲדֹמ in v19 as Edom and emended שֵׁיִר in v22 to Seir.

<sup>241</sup> Compare v20-23 and the closing verses of Psalm 69.

<sup>242</sup> See p188-189 for a discussion of the relevance of Psalm 68 to the Exile.

<sup>243</sup> E. Podechard, "Psaume LXVIII" *Revue Biblique* 54 (1947), p502-520; J. Wellhausen, *The Book of Psalms* (New York, 1898), p191.

<sup>244</sup> P. Haupt, "Der Achtundsechzigste Psalm" *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 23 (1906-7), p225.



- The affinity of language and style to other poetry which is generally regarded as early (Psalm 18, Ex 15, Jud 5, Deut 33 etc). One should note, for instance, the paratactic style, the vocabulary, the use of adjacently repeated words.
- The number of rare or unusual expressions (p74). While these may reflect stylistic tendency or deliberate archaising, the fact remains that the majority of texts which contain many unusual expressions are indeed to be dated early (the exception is the divine speeches of Job where rare words appear to have been selected deliberately).<sup>245</sup>
- Many instances of defective spelling. Albright comments that "...the Psalm swarms with instances of misunderstood defective spelling at the end of words, in accordance with the characteristic fully defective orthography of Phoenicia and early Israel, which was replaced by the standard spelling of the Divided Monarchy in the course of the ninth century B.C.E."<sup>246</sup>
- Use of repetitive, climactic or staircase parallelism.<sup>247</sup>
- Use of variety of ancient designations for God.
- Absence of prose particles.
- Divine warrior language tends to occur in texts that are regarded as earlier.
- The linguistic and thematic connections to Canaanite texts, in particular Ugaritic. Albright's statement that "fully half of the unique words which strew this Psalm may be elucidated from Ugaritic"<sup>248</sup> overstates the case, but is indicative of the connections that can be made.

To these points Albright adds another argument: "Since the LXX misunderstood the Psalm wherever possible and obviously came after a whole series of inner-Hebrew misunderstandings, I cannot date it after the Exile under any circumstances. To anyone fully conversant with Ugaritic literature, it is quite incredible that its content can be late, even assuming deliberate archaism .... It should now be obvious that Psalm 68, for instance, is far closer in date to Ugaritic than it is to the LXX."<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Compare the findings of F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew – A Study of the Phenomenon and its Treatment since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms* (SBLDS 74; Chico: Scholars, 1984) with D.A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*.

<sup>246</sup> W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems—Ps LXVIII" *HUCA* 23.1 (1950), p10.

<sup>247</sup> Cf W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue", p5.

<sup>248</sup> W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue", p3.

<sup>249</sup> W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue", p4 n7.



The general linguistic/stylistic argument can be summed up by a quote from DeWette: “The more difficult, the more rugged in the style, the more nervous, vigorous, and compressed in the thoughts, the older a Psalm is; on the contrary, the easier and the more flowing in the style, the more transparent, regular, and smooth in the contents, the later it is.”<sup>250</sup>

In contrast, evidence that has been brought forward for a late dating includes little more than the following:<sup>251</sup>

- The term כְּשָׁרוֹת, prosperity, in v6 comes from a root which appears only in late books (Est, Ecc), though it is common in Aramaic.
- The nearest parallel for the term צִחִיָּה, parched land, in v6 is Ezek.
- The term for ‘scatter’ in v30 has been claimed to be not an ordinary Hebrew word, but half Aramaic in form.

In the face of rather obvious linguistic evidence for the age of the Psalm, the burden of proof rests on any theory which claims that this appearance of age is non-existent or a masquerade. The data just presented are not sufficient to substantiate the claim of a late date; the weight of linguistic evidence supports an early date for Psalm 68. Linguistic evidence will not allow precise pinpointing of a date, but it has enabled the location of a general period — no later than early to mid-Monarchy.

### ***Allusion and Quotation***

The use of allusion and quotation in Psalm 68 has been extensively treated. Broadly, Psalm 68 was argued to be building on and reworking previous archaic texts such as Ex 15 and Jud 5. This means that it cannot be dated earlier than they, and thus cannot, in its present form, be placed earlier than the early Monarchy. Equally, however, it contains no examples of deliberate quotation which demand a late dating. I argued that the connections which other scholars have drawn with Second Isaiah are on a different level from those with early poetic texts, and are not of special interest (any allusions that do exist probably reflect Deutero-Isaiah’s use of the language of Psalm 68).<sup>252</sup> Any date of early- to mid-Monarchy onwards would effectively explain the allusive character of Psalm 68.

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<sup>250</sup> Cited in J.J.S. Perowne, *Psalms*, p500-501

<sup>251</sup> Compare A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p375-6 for an attempt to make this case.

<sup>252</sup> A helpful discussion of the issues involved may be found in B.D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture. Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), especially p6-16.

I also argued for close parallels between Psalm 68 and the biblical presentation of the reign of David, in particular the taking of the ark to Zion. The narratives of Solomon and the dedication of the temple also provided another point of connection. This suggests that, insofar as these narratives reflect historical reality, they represent suitable occasions for the composition of Psalm 68. Insofar as they are not representative of historical fact, Psalm 68 can be seen to reflect the same outlook, and could have been created to support the same presentation of history, which is found in those accounts. This latter view does not help in locating *when* either the accounts or Psalm 68 might have been written. For that it is necessary to look more closely at the political and cultural scenario implicit in the texts.

### ***Content of the Text***

This section builds on two earlier parts of the dissertation: the connections between Psalm 68 and the narratives of biblical history, and the implied audience of the Psalm. There are several significant points which must be taken into account when searching for an occasion for the composition of Psalm 68:

- The jubilant and triumphal tone of the Psalm requires a period of relative prosperity and political/military triumph for the community that produced and used it. The nation reflected in this Psalm appears vigorously in the ascendancy; only 7c and 14a may potentially refer to Israel's failures. This is not the language of the underprivileged and downtrodden dreaming of release. It is the language of the successful anticipating an even greater future; the Psalm implies a political and military autonomy.<sup>253</sup>
- Even though the ark is not mentioned explicitly, yet the text revolves around it. It is difficult to see the relevance of composing such a Psalm when there was no ark.
- v16-19 assumes some dispute about the main location at which God was to be worshipped and the identity of his mountain.
- The tribal list assumes that the tribes were united (i.e. a pre-exilic occasion when the northern tribes still existed, and a time before the division of the Monarchy). The reference to Benjamin and Judah seems to imply a deliberate show of respect towards both royal tribes (surely a magnanimous political move on the behalf of the new ruling class!).<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Similar points are stressed by DeWette (cited in J.J.S. Perowne, *Psalms*), and E.W. Hengstenberg, *Commentar über die Psalmen* (Berlin: 1849-52).

<sup>254</sup> So, persuasively, J.J.S. Perowne, *Psalms*, p499.

- The Baal language and the side-swipes at Canaanite mythology imply a time when Baal worship was a serious alternative to the YHWH cult.
- The reference to Egypt could be included because of the typical or symbolic power of Egypt in Israel's story; however, if a more literal level is sought, the reigns of Solomon and Hezekiah are the most likely candidates (though in neither case is the term 'tribute' quite appropriate!). Perowne argues that reference to Egypt rather than Assyria or Babylon implies a date prior to the great Asiatic monarchies; he cautions against placing too much weight on this argument, however.<sup>255</sup>

These points fit the biblical accounts of the reigns of David and Solomon effectively, and for many of them this period provides the most satisfactory explanation.<sup>256</sup> Hupfeld, while preferring to assign the Psalm a post-exilic date himself (with less weighty arguments!), commented that this view "gives incontestably the best sense; in fact, it is the only one which suits, not only the mention of Zion, in opposition to Sinai and the heights of Bashan, and the historical retrospective glance at the earlier leading of God from Sinai onwards, as introductory to this triumphal entry, but also the lofty utterances and prospects connected with it."<sup>257</sup> With these comments one can only wonder why he abandoned the dating in favour of a later one!

In contrast with allusions which fit the time of David and Solomon, there is little that demands a later occasion. In dating the Psalm to the time of David, Albright commented: "The basis for this dating is partly that none of the verses suggests a date after the reign of David to me ..."<sup>258</sup> He is right; the Psalm *could* have been written later, but there is little that points to this. The best alternative that I can propose is the time of Josiah's reforms when Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history, were, according the traditional hypothesis, produced. But the language about the ascent of the ark and the triumphs of God does not fit as well with that period as it does with the days of David.

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<sup>255</sup> J.J.S. Perowne, *Psalms*, p500.

<sup>256</sup> For a well-presented alternative, see A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p375-377.

<sup>257</sup> H. Hupfeld, *Die Psalmen* (Gotha, 1855-62).

<sup>258</sup> W.F. Albright, "A Catalogue", p10.



## 7.3. Conclusion

Psalm 68 cannot be dated with certainty, and there are a number of theories which can be defended with a reasonable degree of support. What does seem clear is that the Psalm was written to coincide with the biblical narratives of the ascent of the ark (whether to David's tabernacle, to the temple, or both) — whether it was written at that point in direct celebration, or on some later occasion to recall it. The linguistic evidence supports an early date, and there are no substantial reasons to reject the view that it was indeed composed in the early Monarchy. This provides a coherent explanation of the content and mood of the text, and appears to be the simplest theory of its origin. But at the end of the day there is no proof that it could not have been written later.

## 8. ARKS, CULTS, AND FESTIVALS

This section is concerned with the cultic setting of Psalm 68 in Israel's religious life. Studies of this kind have perhaps been characterised during the previous century by excessive assurance; my approach is much more tentative, since I argue that there is insufficient evidence within the Psalm for a detailed 'reading-off' of a particular cultic occasion. I begin with a review of form-critical research, which is followed by the evidence for finding a cultic occasion within Psalm 68. I then an attempt to identify and infer a description of that occasion.

### 8.1. Form-Critical Research

Psalm 68 is quite clearly a mixed-genre Psalm, consisting of sections which individually conform quite well to several of the frequently-attested *Gattungen* to be found in the Psalter. Although Gerstenberger's important *Forms of Old Testament Literature* volume which includes Psalm 68 has yet to appear, many scholars since Gunkel have addressed themselves to the question of genre and form-critical categories in Psalm 68.

Some have sought to find a dominating genre which captures the majority of the Psalm, even if other genres intrude in certain portions. As Ortlund notes, praise to God is certainly the dominant theme, and if a form critical category must be given, it must certainly reflect this fact.<sup>259</sup> But to state this is scarcely to enable major insights into Psalm 68. Furthermore, the lack of consensus and the variety of forms on display counts against an approach which seeks to discover any one overriding form (unless the definition of that form is stretched in such a way as to include every additional feature which Psalm 68 contains). Form critical analysis, though invaluable in 'pigeon-holing' many simpler Psalms, tends to flounder when tackling a composition as complex as this. To persist in assigning one over-riding genre to the Psalm is to be guilty of reductionism.

To emphasise this diversity it is worth drawing attention to the variety of forms which have been unearthed in Psalm 68. v6 presents an illustration of the participial style of hymns; v12,13,23,24 have been identified as oracles; v7-10,18 manifest the prayer style;<sup>260</sup> v25-28

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<sup>259</sup> R. Ortlund, *Psalm 68*, p513.

<sup>260</sup> So A. Weiser, *The Psalms. A Commentary (OTL; London: SCM, 1962)*, p485.

and possibly v18-19 describe the enactment of cultic events; v17 takes us back to the hymn again.<sup>261</sup> Yet again, parts of the Psalm constitute requests, others show thanksgiving, yet others are reminiscent of the victory song. Some scholars have described the Psalm as a liturgy, while others have objected to this designation. Anderson and Mowinckel have used the term 'processional'.<sup>262</sup>

Whatever term is chosen, there are aspects of the Psalm which are left uncovered. Psalm 68 is not a text for which form-criticism yields its most illuminating (least of all, convincing) results. We may well get a considerable distance further in an examination of the purpose and function of Psalm 68 in the life of ancient Israel, but such examination must go beyond the hasty exchange of form-critical terminology, as if the Psalm may be adequately characterised by any one of its designations, or as if the Psalm is explained once the relevant categories have been distinguished.

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<sup>261</sup> A. Weiser, *Psalms*, p486.

<sup>262</sup> S. Mowinckel, *Der achtundsechzigste Psalm* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1953), p17.



## 8.2. Psalm 68 in the Cult

I now examine the evidence available for projecting a cultic setting for the Psalm.

### ***A Cultic Setting***

There is sufficient explicit description of cultic situations and use of cultic language in Psalm 68 to *require* that a ritual setting for the Psalm be presupposed. The unattractive alternative is to argue that such language alludes to earlier cultic practices for some other reason (such as to envision an eschatological era) and that it does not necessarily imply that the Psalm itself had a cultic setting. Such a hypothesis would be unnecessarily complex, and unreasonably overlooks the simpler explanation of the data. It seems that a particular cultic occasion is either described for posterity, or that the text is designed as a liturgy for use at such a cultic occasion.

It is worth reviewing the evidence. By quoting the Ark Saying at its outset, the Psalm opens with a clear reference to the cultic object *par excellence* of the Hebrew Bible, the ark of the covenant. This opening reference is consonant with the repeated emphasis on God's abiding presence with his people throughout the Psalm. On top of this, the repeated references to the goings forth of God (v2,8,12,15,19,23,25) make an excellent backdrop to the explicit description of an Israelite procession in v26-28, and the use of the ark as part of a cultic procession. The passage in v26-28 probably contains designations for three musical roles, as well as a description of the tribes who are involved and their order of procession. This Israelite procession may be conflated with God's own going forth, styled 'the processions of God' in v25. The procession is directional: it is bound for the sanctuary; the language which describes it contains clearly echoes of previous notable occasions in biblical history (Chapter 3.3). The term *מקהלות* in v27 probably describes either guild-groups of temple ministers in procession, or worshippers assembled in companies under their family heads. Schmidt writes:

“Also um eine Prozession handelt es sich, und zwar um eine solche, wie wir sie aus 24 und 47 kennen, bei der der Gott selbst als “König” inmitten oder an der Spitze seines festlich bewegten Volkes in sein “Heiligtum”, also in den Tempel, gezogen kommt. Hier wird uns nun dieser Festzug wirklich anschaulich: An der Spitze zieht ein Sängerkhor; dahinter die heilige Musik, die Harfen- und Zitherspieler. Zu ihrer Seite

aber betwegt sich ein Reigen von Mädchen, die den Takt zu ihrem Tanz auf dem Tamburin schlagen”<sup>263</sup>

The sort of data which Schmidt is drawing on here (as outlined in my preceding paragraphs) may be corroborated by other evidence. The use of mythological language which was clearly connected with cultic rites amongst the Canaanites suggests that we might well have the description of a ritual occasion.<sup>264</sup> The repeated reference to the dwelling and presence of God makes it likely that the celebrations at a specific sanctuary are depicted. The description of the ascent of God as the climactic part of the Psalm might lend itself naturally to being acted out in some way, while the repeated references to the Exodus and wilderness traditions would harmonise superbly with a ritual procession, particularly if the ark was involved. According to the Pentateuch, the Exodus event is to be celebrated in a whole host of cultic / ritual institutions, and a cultic setting here would be quite in step with this. The repeated injunction to praise God and rejoice before him would chime with a national occasion of rejoicing.

For these reasons there is a good basis for attempting to reconstruct a cultic occasion to account for the Psalm. An influential body of interpretation has been carried out along these lines, including work by Mowinckel, Kraus, Anderson, Gray, Caquot, Eaton, Johnson, and many others.

### ***But Which One?***

It is one thing to make the assumption that a cultic occasion must underlie Psalm 68; it is another matter to specify what that occasion was and to reconstruct it on the basis of the Psalm and others with which it may be compared. I discuss three options, the first having attained the widest acceptance in the modern literature. I then face up to the limitations of any reconstructions of the *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 68 and any reconstructions of the cultic occasion to which it may testify.

### **An Autumn Festival?**

It is Mowinckel who has linked Psalm 68 in the most detailed way with a hypothesised Autumn Enthronement Festival, a festival which has been reconstructed on the basis of Babylonian and Canaanite evidence, modified and expanded by the content of the biblical

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<sup>263</sup> H. Schmidt, *Die Psalmen* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1934), p127-8.

<sup>264</sup> On the cultic origin of poetry, see the discussion and comparison with Akkadian poetry in D. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant – Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), p63-64.



Psalms in particular. Mowinckel explained the disconnectedness and diversity of Psalm 68 by virtue of its status as a cultic piece for this occasion.<sup>265</sup> As a variant of this, Gaster proposed that the Psalm is a libretto of a pantomime performed at the Canaanite New Year Festival which has subsequently been worked over for liturgical use in the YHWH cult.<sup>266</sup> Other variations on these approaches are found in the literature.

The existence of an enthronement festival is perhaps no longer accepted as wholeheartedly as once it was as a standard conclusion of Psalms scholarship. In particular, some of the Babylonian data Mowinckel used for his reconstruction have been questioned, as has the extent of data in the Psalms which supports the hypothesis. My purpose here is not to engage in a full-scale examination of the theory of an Autumn Festival, or the attempt to reconstruct it on Babylonian evidence or data from the Psalms. I am interested only in what Psalm 68 may have to say about such a festival (if it did exist), and how far it fits in with the autumn festivals described in the Hebrew Bible (New Year, Atonement and Tabernacles).

It can be said at the outset that there is relatively little correlation between Psalm 68 and the three biblical feasts. Mowinckel and followers would argue that this is because this biblical material does not reflect the reality of the pre-exilic period, and that an enthronement festival must be assumed. With this in mind, I examine the data in Psalm 68; the following is a discussion of those passages which can be read as descriptive of a cultic occasion.

- The use of ark language and descriptions of God's goings suggests a ritual procession in which the ark was carried towards and installed in a particular mountain sanctuary — presumably Zion.
- The survey of Israel's history through Exodus, wilderness and conquest suggests a major national feast. Note that the celebration of the Exodus is a major component of the biblical specification for the Feast of Tabernacles.
- God is spoken of as a king coming into his sanctuary in v25; this fits with the concept of an enthronement festival and chimes with texts such as Psalm 47 and the **יהוה מלך** Psalms.

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<sup>265</sup> R. Ortlund Jr., *Psalm 68 in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Interpretation* (unpublished PhD: University of Aberdeen, 1985), p503, wryly comments that the autumn festival dominates rather than serves Mowinckel's exegesis.

<sup>266</sup> T.H. Gaster, *Thespis, Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Near East* (New York, 1950), p415ff. Interestingly, in the later revised edition of 1961 Gaster curtails his comments; there is only brief reference to Psalm 68 (p451).



- The language of Canaanite mythology suggests the possibility that the Psalm *may* describe a rival occasion to those taking place in the surrounding cultures at New Year.
- There are various elements in the Psalm which could be acted out in a festal drama (compare Gaster's use of the term 'pantomime' cited above). Examples include God's battles with beasts (cf v21-23,31), the freeing of prisoners, the fleeing of kings, and the bringing of tribute — all of which are described in the Psalm. However, we have absolutely no indication how this may have been carried out, or indeed that it happened at all. There is no need for any of these references to be assigned a 'dramatic' interpretation of this kind, even though it is possible. Nor does our understanding of the practice of other ANE cultures determine the issue, for there can be no assurance that Israelite practice was the same.
- Reference to God's giving of rain (v9,10) links both to Baal's role as giver of rain and to Babylonian autumnal celebrations.<sup>267</sup> It is interesting that both the Exodus and God's giving of rain are celebrated in nearby Psalms (65,66), perhaps suggesting that the sequence of Psalms culminating in 68 may have formed part of a liturgy celebrating these facts.
- Reference to the fountain/source at v26 may suggest that one of the important locations of the procession was the Gihon spring at the base of the temple hill. Perhaps the final leg of the procession began there and ascended to the temple (cf v18,19).
- A number of different scenarios may underlie v19. The ascent of God (the ark) to Zion has already been discussed, but the phrase 'received gifts קִבְּלָהּ' may be understood in several ways. Goulder thinks of human sacrifices which is not impossible, though it contradicts other biblical texts which forbid it.<sup>268</sup> Another option is that on this occasion men were 'taken' and inaugurated into the tabernacle/temple service in some way, whether for life or for a prescribed period (compare the way in which Samuel is given to the Lord, and the traditions of female temple ministers). The reference to the rebellious may indicate that criminals were forced to undertake a period of compulsory service of some kind (a kind of ancient 'Community Service'!). Yet again, the phrase may refer to the distribution of gifts/spoils which have been won in YHWH's battles (compare v20

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<sup>267</sup> Compare N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel. A New History of Israelite Society* (The Biblical Seminar, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988) on whether the Baal cycle was intended for the New Year festival.

<sup>268</sup> M.D. Goulder, "The Bitters of Victory (68)" in *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51-72* (JSOTS 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p191-216, esp. p205-206; cf J.D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993).

which implies that gifts may have been given). We have an illustration of this when David distributed food and drink to the people when the ark had been taken to Jerusalem. Such a procedure could have become part of an annual celebration. All this is conjecture, but the suggestions given represent some of the possible ways in which the verse may have been applied in a cultic setting. It seems likely that some particular cultic act is indicated by the phrase.

- Something of the order and procedure of the procession is described in v26-28.
- v29 constitutes a plea from the people for God to bless and empower them. Such a plea would form the natural antecedent for the king or a prophet to bless the people on God's behalf once the procession was complete. This is precisely what happened in both the accounts of David's bringing the ark to Zion and Solomon's dedication of the temple.

There is no doubt both from biblical and ANE evidence that the autumn new year was the time of major national celebration for the cultures concerned. It makes sense, therefore, to assume that if Psalm 68 was used as a regular national processional celebration of Israel's history and God's presence involving the ark, that this would probably have been the time of year when it would have been used. It is more questionable, however, that a festival closely corresponding to Mowinckel's depiction of the Autumn Festival ever existed in that form, and if it did, whether the Psalm fits precisely or even closely with that description. There is not a lot of evidence that it does. In other words, while it is possible or even probable that the Psalm was used on some regular occasion as part of a processional celebration, it cannot be stated with certainty when that was or what it was like.

### The Feast of Weeks / Pentecost?

There is some evidence that Psalm 68 was connected in later times with the Feast of Weeks / Pentecost, perhaps as early as the first few centuries BCE, although exactly when the connection came to be made is not clear. There are two strands of evidence. One is the tradition of interpreting Psalm 68 with reference to Moses and the giving of the law on Sinai. On this view it is Moses who ascends on high to receive the law in v16-19. There was a strong tradition of texts dealing with Moses' ascent to heaven, and it was an unsurprising development that Psalm 68 came to be linked to this.<sup>269</sup> The second strand of evidence is that which connects the Feast of Weeks with the giving of the law. This is exemplified in Jubilees 1v5; 6v11,17; 15v1-24 (cf 1v1 and 15v1), and in rabbinic material (although here the case is

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<sup>269</sup> I touch on this in a later section, p253-255.



less strong for the early dating of the tradition).<sup>270</sup> These two pieces of evidence are then combined to suggest that Psalm 68 was used liturgically at the feast. The tradition of linking Psalm 68 and Pentecost was widespread in the Christian tradition in the first century, and this may be indicative of an association between the two in the pre-Christian period.<sup>271</sup>

In sum, there is no evidence that Psalm 68 was associated with the Feast of Weeks before the second century BCE, although it may have been. If the Psalm is read with reference to Moses then it can be linked interestingly with the Feast of Weeks if that feast is also held to relate to the giving of the law. But such a Mosaic reading is a secondary reading and does not reflect the original composition of the Psalm. It is an inferior reading to the one I have presented in relation to David, Solomon, and the ark.

### A Particular Historical Occasion?

In earlier sections I have argued for a connection between Psalm 68 and the ascent of the ark to Zion. It is possible that Psalm 68 was created specifically for that occasion (or afterwards in celebration of it), and that it had no active role in the cult after that, other than as a reminder of what David did. This is a sufficient explanation for the existence of Psalm 68 in the Psalter today, and there is no evidence which *requires* the assumption of a particular regular occasion (such as autumn festival). However, it is at least equally probable, and perhaps more likely, that the Psalm continued to be used on a regular basis as part of a ritual celebration of God's kingship and deeds among his people, and for his presence among them in ark and temple. One must also admit the (perhaps unlikely) possibility that the Psalm never had an original use in David or Solomon's day, and that it was a later composition designed specifically for the kind of festival just described. In sum, Psalm 68 most probably had an original setting in David's day and was subsequently used as part of a regular celebration of God's presence among his people.

### Conclusion

Weiser succinctly captures the difficulty of trying to use Psalm 68 to reconstruct the festival he sees encapsulated there: "The difficulty which the exposition of the Psalm has to face lies in the fact that we do not know the whole liturgy of the festival cult and are only able to establish some fragments of it with the aid of inferences from this partial liturgical score —

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<sup>270</sup> For full discussion see W.H. Harris III, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p154 and sources there.



this may be the proper way of classifying this Psalm.”<sup>272</sup> Indeed, there is a whole issue of circularity which is problematic for using the Psalms to reconstruct the cult: the data in the Psalms is used to hypothesise the existence of a festival, and this hypothesis is then used to explain the Psalms. While this is not ideal, there is a certain inevitability about it; there can be no doubt that a greater caution is needed about what we can know than was shown by a previous generation of scholarship.

In short, then, while there is good evidence for assuming that Psalm 68 reflects a cultic occasion, and probably a regular one involving the ritual procession of the ark (which may have originated in the particular historical occasion of the bringing of the ark to Zion and subsequently into Solomon’s temple), there is no possibility to reconstruct what the occasion was like from the data of Psalm 68, other than in the broadest terms. Even when the evidence of the other Psalms is brought into the equation (and this begs a whole series of questions about whether the cultic events reflected in them can be so readily equated), there is still scant evidence for a detailed reconstruction — just clues and hints which allow us to speculate what might have been. It is not invalid to speculate and wonder, indeed it is a fascinating task to do so. But it is important to remember the limitations of the approach.

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<sup>271</sup> Compare H.St.J. Thackeray, *The Septuagint and Jewish Worship* (Schweich Lectures 1920; London: British Academy / OUP, 1921), p57-60; W.H. Harris III, *Descent of Christ*.

<sup>272</sup> A. Weiser, *Psalms*, p483.

## 9. READING PSALM 68

This section draws together the main findings of this study and summarises the broad conclusions for which I have argued. I restate what I take to be a good reading of the 'original' meaning of the Psalm before the briefest of explorations of other ways in which the Psalm may be and has been read. I close with a look at some of the distinctive aspects of the Psalm which have ensured its continued use through the centuries and which today may still both trouble, challenge and inspire.

### 9.1. An 'Original' Reading

My dissertation has adopted a 'bottom-up' approach to building an interpretation of Psalm 68. I now summarise the results of this to defend the original setting for the Psalm which I have chosen.

#### *Summary of Method*

After my translation and linguistic notes, I began with a thorough analysis of the vocabulary of the Psalm which highlighted key themes which must be accounted for when an interpretation is constructed. Certain features of style and vocabulary such as the repetitious references to God and the distribution of divine names and epithets, the use of archaic or unusual expressions, and the atomistic nature of the piece, led to the suspicion that the Psalm may have an important theological message and that it may have been used for a central cultic occasion or as a celebration of a significant historical event. Paying attention to the variety of geographic locations referred to was another important element in attempting to capture the dynamics of the Psalm.

These various features, along with others which were also noted, should be accounted for in a hypothesis of the original meaning of the Psalm. Why does the Psalm so persistently refer to the movement and dwelling of God? Why does it have such a vigorous and triumphant manner? Why is it the only text which refers to Sinai *and* Jerusalem? These are questions which such a hypothesis needs to answer.

I then began to work through larger compositional units, noting the careful construction of lines and strophes and the intricate way in which these are grouped. I observed that this counters the destabilising changes of topic and lack of continuity which can initially seem to

pervade the Psalm. No evidence for a precise metrical system was found and syllable counts were deemed to be relatively unhelpful in contrast to stress counts. The stress counts revealed a broad consistency in line-length across the poem, but there is too much variation for a theory that the poet worked to a precise system. Much more important is the artful structural ordering of elements within the line, verse and strophe.

The structure of the Psalm as a whole was eventually considered — the results of the earlier study of vocabulary and thematic movement driving this inquiry and supporting the structure eventually chosen. A significant symmetry was found between the first and second halves of the Psalm, providing a sense of closure and paralleling the procession of God before his people in the first half with their processions in his honour in the second. This observation also enabled the picking out of a central section in the Psalm, the part which deals with YHWH's ascension on high and his resolve to dwell forever in the mountain he has chosen (v16-19). This structural arrangement makes a feature of many of the points noted in the chapter on vocabulary.

When intertextual parallels were examined it was found that a probable setting for the Psalm at last began to emerge. Psalm 68 trades in allusions to notable ancient texts of the Hebrew Bible, in particular Jud 5 and Ex 15 — and by doing so claims implicitly to be an extension (and in the case of Ex 15, a fulfilment) of these traditions. Psalm 68 was found to create deliberate linkage between the traditions of the Exodus, wilderness and conquest on the one hand, and the traditions of the united Monarchy, the bringing of the ark to Zion, and the building of the temple on the other. Reading Psalm 68 in the light of the ark narrative was found to be a fruitful enterprise. Psalm 68 is a tapestry of allusions to certain other texts and events of the Hebrew Bible; it draws together important traditions of Moses and David and seeks to show how these form a remarkable whole. The real focus of the Psalm is David's bringing of the ark to Zion which is claimed to be the glorious conclusion of God's triumphant march through the wilderness at the head of his people in the days of Moses.

With these results in place, 'traditional' matters of authorship, dating, and compositional history could be examined. While some suggestions were made as to the text's possible growth and development, it was argued that there was little that could be known for certainty about this history, and that the text was best considered essentially as a unity. An examination of implied audience and dating brought no facts to light which suggested a revision of the setting already proposed. While it is probable that the Psalm was used regularly as a cultic piece, perhaps as the liturgy for a procession, it seems likely that its



original setting was to commemorate and legitimise the establishment of ark and temple worship in Jerusalem, and to draw the united Monarchy together in celebration of it.

### ***Bringing the Ark to Zion***

It is worth laying out systematically the types of evidence which support this proposal:

- The Psalm begins with a quotation of the ark saying, requiring that the ark feature prominently in any proposed setting.
- Copious allusions are made to the wilderness and conquest which both supports the previous point and suggests that the Psalm's setting should have some connection with that period.
- The intertextual references and grand style suggest that the Psalm makes central theological and political claims. David's placement of the ark in Zion would have required just such legitimation.
- The rather unique linking of Sinai and Jerusalem is particularly well explained. What David has done in bringing the ark to Jerusalem is portrayed as the logical fulfilment of what God began when he brought Israel through the wilderness.
- The central section concerning the ascension of God and his determination to dwell in his chosen mountain forever receives its most convincing explanation under this theory.
- The processional language is naturally explained by the Samuel accounts of the bringing of the ark to Zion.

There are other points which support or at least allow this theory to stand:

- The evidence such as it is supports a relatively early date for the Psalm; the Davidic/Solomonic period would be acceptable.
- The polemic against Baal worship and Baal's mountain fits the period (though it fits the later Monarchy as well).
- The triumph and conquest depicted in the Psalm (particularly in the role of the other nations) meshes with the biblical picture of the reigns of David and Solomon.

It is quite probable that a regular festival involving a procession of the ark continued to celebrate the event and that Psalm 68 was used on such occasions. But the amount that can be known with certainty about such a festival (if it existed at all) is very limited.

## 9.2. Reading with Other Horizons

An important aspect of the continuing power of Psalm 68 to speak through the centuries has been its susceptibility to other interpretations in addition to the one I have proposed as the original setting. So, for instance, the wilderness language may be reinterpreted in the light of Deutero-Isaiah's second Exodus, the 'temple at Jerusalem' now standing for the Second Temple. The ark's ascension to Zion may be interpreted as an allegory of Christ's ascension into heaven (so Calvin). Or again, the Psalm may be read as a hinge between past and future, a celebration of God's past conquests *and* an eschatological vision of what is to come. Others have attempted to read the Psalm entirely as a projection of the future. It would make a fascinating study to examine what it is about Psalm 68 which makes these and other readings possible. Here I can offer only a few introductory comments.

### ***Filling the Gaps and Joining the Dots***

In an earlier section I looked at the underdeterminacy which is a feature of Psalm 68. This has played an important role in the susceptibility of the text to different readings. Two examples will suffice. First, the Psalm's failure to identify the mountain of v16-19 makes way for several interpretative possibilities, the most dominant of which has been the Jewish tradition of taking it to be Sinai. There is support for this in the Psalm's earlier reference to Sinai and the echoes of the wilderness and conquest; for readers looking to emphasise the figure of Moses and the giving of the law, it is an entirely natural step to consider and even adopt the possibility that Sinai is referred to in these verses. Second, the Psalm similarly fails to specify *who* it is who has ascended on high in the same passage. The context makes the natural referent to be God himself, but it need not necessarily be so. The Jewish tradition exhibited in the Targum and elsewhere takes the 'you' who has 'ascended on high' to be none other than Moses who ascended Mount Sinai to receive the law!<sup>273</sup> This move enables other links to be made. The 'gifts' now can refer to the law, or, on another interpretation, to the gifts bestowed on the craftsmen such as Bezaleel who were to construct the tabernacle (compare Paul's application of the passage to the gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon Christ's ascension in Ephesians 4v8-9).

Another feature which helps the creation of different interpretations is the atomistic nature of the piece, and the frequency of references and allusions which are now obscure. When



approaching an atomistic text the reader has to join the dots, as it were, between the disparate parts of the poem in order to construct an interpretation. A *scriptible* text of this kind gives the interpreter a series of choices; the dots may be joined in different ways with lines of differing length and direction. The interpreter must decide how the various parts of the poem relate to one another. In proposing an original setting for the Psalm I have implicitly claimed that there are more and less direct ways of constructing interpretations, and that mine is an economical and logical one. But there are others which are also legitimate, even if they might be regarded as tortuous in places.

Furthermore, the stream of allusions which the Psalm makes, not all of which are now recognizable, allows a reader to make different connections depending on which texts Psalm 68 is being read against. If one reads Psalm 68 against the life of Moses, certain connections will come into focus which may not if the Psalm is being read Messianically against the texts of the New Testament.

The ambiguities and obscurities of the Psalm may be 'explained' by relating them to other texts. In this context, the Mosaic and Christological readings of Psalm 68 would form a useful starting point both for an in-depth study of the history of interpretation of Psalm 68, and for wider investigation into the way readers create meaning by placing texts side-by-side and looking for their kind of meaning within them. I shall cite three examples of details within Psalm 68 which have been 'explained' by their juxtaposition with New Testament texts to illustrate this point.<sup>274</sup>

The reference to 'little Benjamin' is accounted for in some more fanciful Christological interpretations as a covert allusion to the apostle Paul, short of stature yet leading the way in taking the gospel to the Gentiles; the northern tribes Zebulun and Naphtali cover the New Testament region of Galilee from whence hailed Jesus' disciples.

Again, v22 ("God will break the head of his enemies, the hairy skull of him who walks in his offences") may easily be linked to the protoevangelium of Gen 3v15, a passage which has always had a greater role to play in Christian rather than Jewish theology. The bruising of the serpent's head has been understood as a reference to Christ's destruction of sin and death, and once this be accepted, such an interpretation is easily transferred to Psalm 68v22. Indeed,

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<sup>273</sup> *Midrash Tehillim* does this, intriguingly citing Prov 21v22 and identifying the wise man of that passage with Moses. See W.G. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, p545+.

<sup>274</sup> Further examples and a thorough discussion of the use of Psalm 68 in Eph 4 were given in M.A. Vincent, "'Leading Captivity Captive': Paul's Use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4", paper presented at the *Annual Seminar on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament*, Hawarden 1998.



the preceding verse which speaks of God's identity as deliverer and as the one to whom belong 'the ways-out from death' would yield ready support to such a suggestion.

As a third example, once a link has been forged with Acts 2, the way is laid open for various other elements of the Psalm to be linked with Pentecost. v12 refers to tidings bearers who bring news of the 'word' which God has 'given'. These may be linked to the apostles and disciples who were to spread the gospel message beginning at Pentecost — the large-scale dimensions of the early preaching work are emphasised in Acts, corresponding with the 'great host' of Psalm 68. The fact that the tidings bearers are feminine in gender has been seen to support the parallel: they are part of the (female) church which makes up the bride of Christ and completes the work which he has begun.

These points may strike the modern reader as fanciful, yet they represent a type of exegetical technique which has long held sway; readings of this kind arise naturally when one seeks to read one text under the strong spotlight of another with a belief that there is one 'gospel message' in the Bible which is reflected everywhere through its pages. Each of these three points is in addition to, yet perhaps triggered by, the more obvious Christological possibilities inherent in v16-19: the ascension on high and the giving of gifts (hence the Church's selection of the Psalm for Whit Sunday). Such a reading is particularly apt if Psalm 68 was indeed associated with the Feast of Weeks / Pentecost. There is much to be explored here.<sup>275</sup>

### ***Psalm 68 Through the Ages***

In addition to the possibilities for reinterpreting the Psalm just discussed and its continued liturgical use through the centuries, there are a number of other reasons why Psalm 68 has continued to speak powerfully. One of these is quite disturbing: the violent language of destruction of enemies. This has been used to legitimise violence in the name of God.

Kirkpatrick comments aptly:

*"It has always been the favourite Psalm of those who felt (whether rightly or wrongly) that their cause was the cause of God, and that in His strength they were sure to conquer. To the crusaders setting out for the recovery of the Holy Land; to Savonarola and his monks as they marched to the 'trial of fire' in the Piazza at Florence; to the Huguenots who called it "the song of battles"; to Cromwell at Dunbar as the sun rose on the mists of the morning and he charged Leslie's army; it has supplied words for the expression of their heartfelt convictions."<sup>276</sup>*

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<sup>275</sup> See W. Hall Harris III, *Descent*; M.A. Vincent, "'Leading Captivity Captive': Paul's Use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4", paper presented at the *Annual Seminar on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament*, Hawarden 1998.

<sup>276</sup> A.F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p377-378.

Even older scholars undertook ideological criticism where v21-23 was concerned. Barnes, for instance, wrote: "This (v21-23) is a terrible passage composed in the spirit of the Old Israel. The Psalmist predicts with satisfaction the extermination of those whom he describes as the enemies of God."<sup>277</sup> But such comments have done little to prevent the use of the Psalm to justify violence and religious intolerance.

As a counterbalance to this negative element, it is worth drawing attention to the power of the vigorous characterisation of God in the Psalm. God is conceived of as active and involved, a God with a masterplan, in control, and able to bring about what he wishes. He is a God who brooks no equal and is sure to triumph. Because of this his people will triumph too. This conception of God is an inspiring and reassuring one, one which will rouse when downcast, and also fittingly expresses the exuberance of triumphant faith. It has assured the Psalm a lasting place in Jewish and Christian affection.

The contrasting pictures of the power and gentleness of God — his bombastic might and his loving and careful attention — are also valuably juxtaposed. God is not merely a terror to his enemies, a God on the rampage, he is also a loving father to the solitary, caring for his people and providing for all their needs.

Another feature which has assured the Psalm constant scrutiny is its obscurity. The very difficulty of Psalm 68 carries a fascination; it invites readers to attempt to fathom its depths,

Finally, the Psalm's picture of God's overarching plan is another feature which has ensured its longevity and popularity. It has a beginning and ending; it is a Psalm which goes somewhere, and its journey may be seen not merely as an account of the journey of the ark from Sinai to Zion, but as a record of the development of the traditions of the Hebrew Bible and as a metaphor which can be cashed out in different ways at the reader's fancy. In this dissertation I have studied the text of the Psalm in minute detail and argued for its original reference, but beyond that there are further worlds to explore, worlds at which my comments here have only been able to hint.

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<sup>277</sup> W.E. Barnes, *Psalms*, p323.

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